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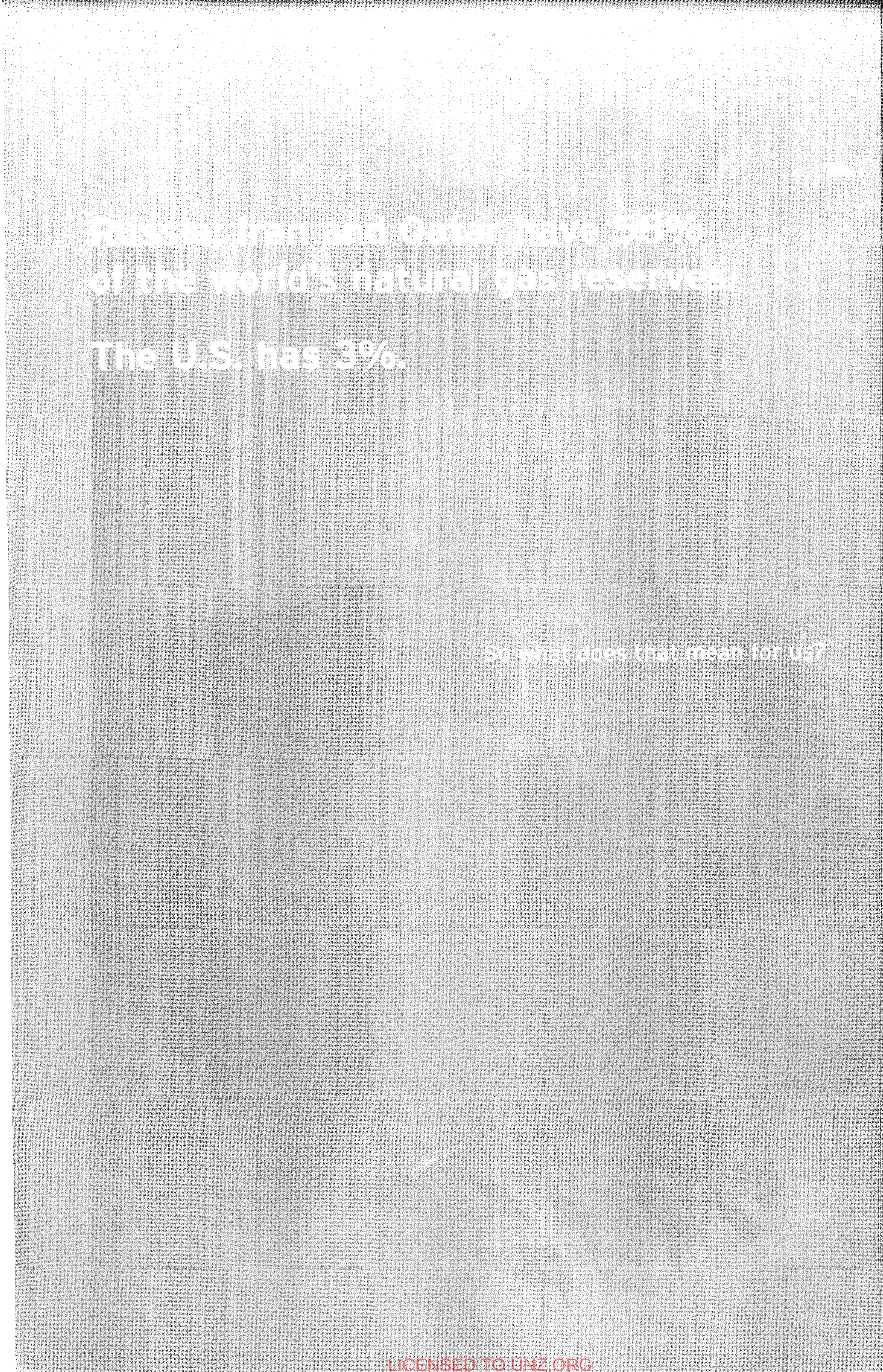
Russia, Iran and Qatar have 58%
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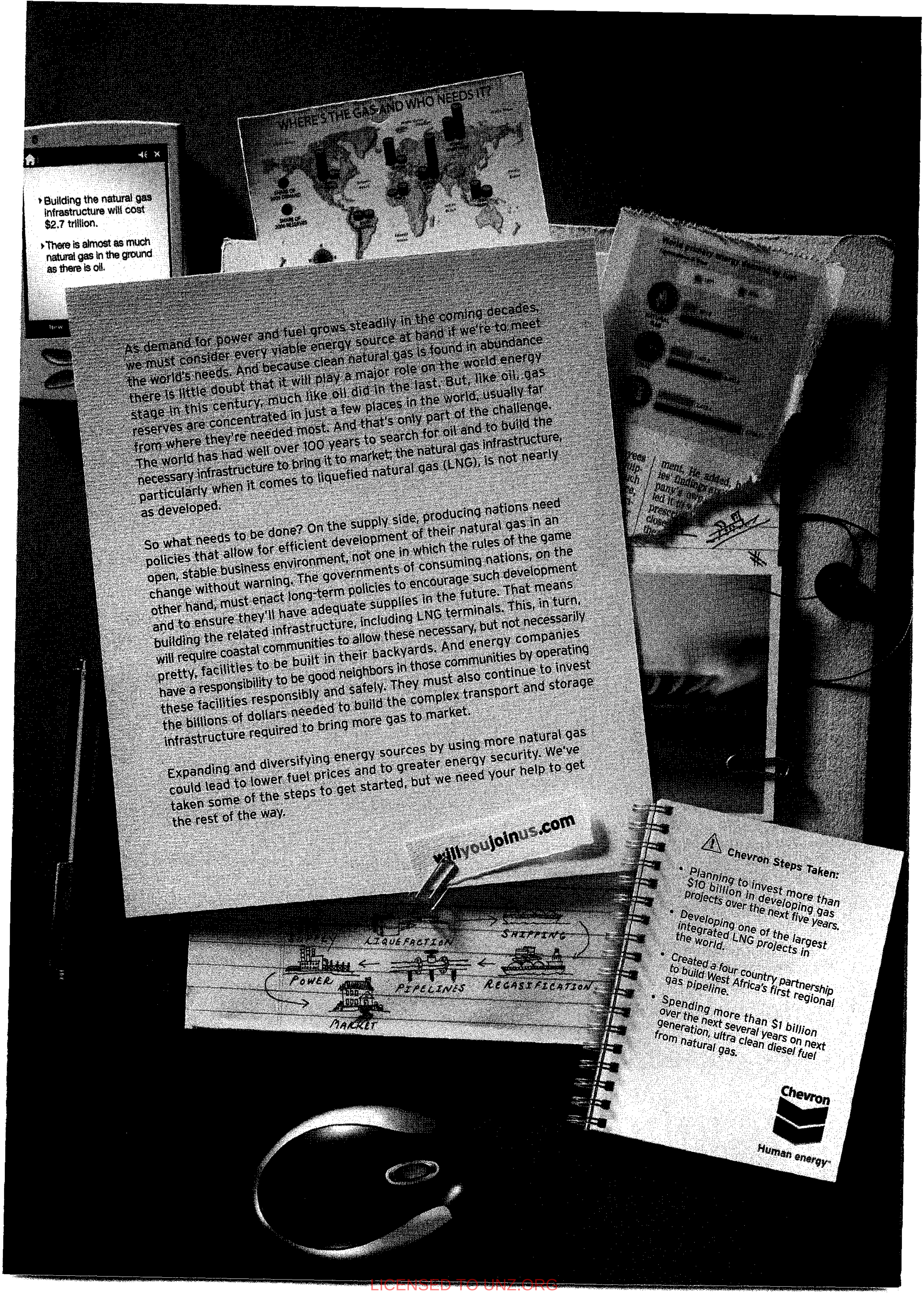

- Building the natural gas infrastructure will cost $2.7 trillion.
- There is almost as much natural gas in the ground as there is oil.

As demand for power and fuel grows steadily in the coming decades, we must consider every viable energy source at hand if we're to meet the world's needs. And because clean natural gas is found in abundance there is little doubt that it will play a major role on the world energy stage in this century, much like oil did in the last. But, like oil, gas reserves are concentrated in just a few places in the world, usually far from where they're needed most. And that's only part of the challenge. The world has had well over 100 years to search for oil and to build the necessary infrastructure to bring it to market; the natural gas infrastructure, particularly when it comes to liquefied natural gas (LNG), is not nearly as developed.

So what needs to be done? On the supply side, producing nations need policies that allow for efficient development of their natural gas in an open, stable business environment, not one in which the rules of the game change without warning. The governments of consuming nations, on the other hand, must enact long-term policies to encourage such development and to ensure they'll have adequate supplies in the future. That means building the related infrastructure, including LNG terminals. This, in turn, will require coastal communities to allow these necessary, but not necessarily pretty, facilities to be built in their backyards. And energy companies have a responsibility to be good neighbors in those communities by operating these facilities responsibly and safely. They must also continue to invest the billions of dollars needed to build the complex transport and storage infrastructure required to bring more gas to market.

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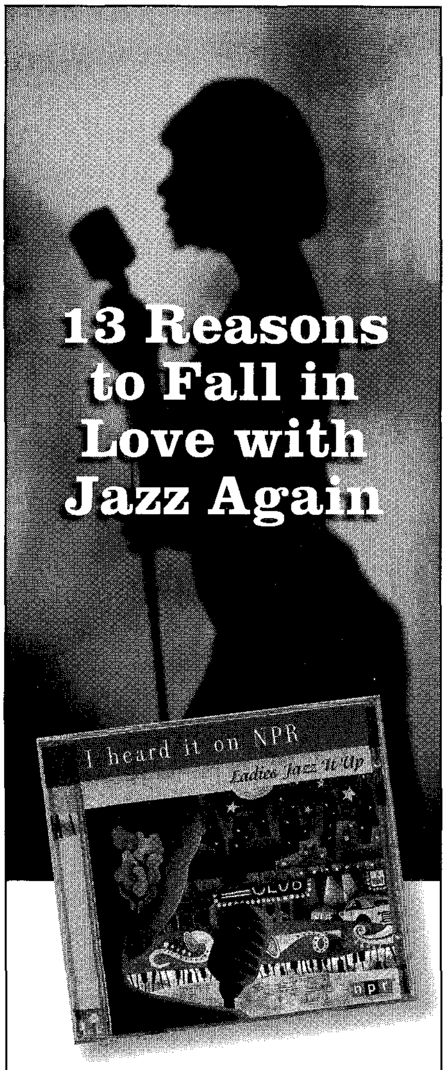

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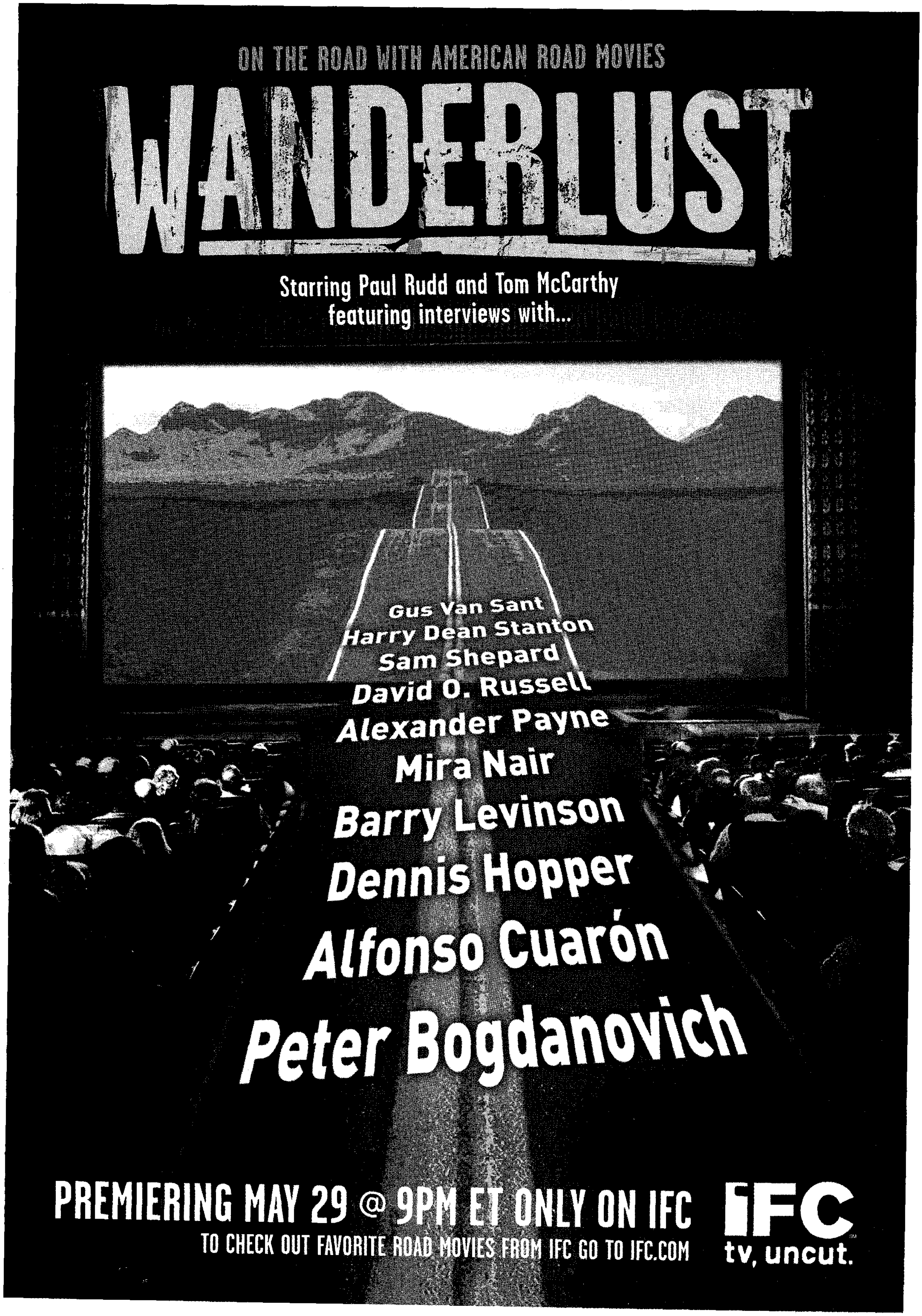

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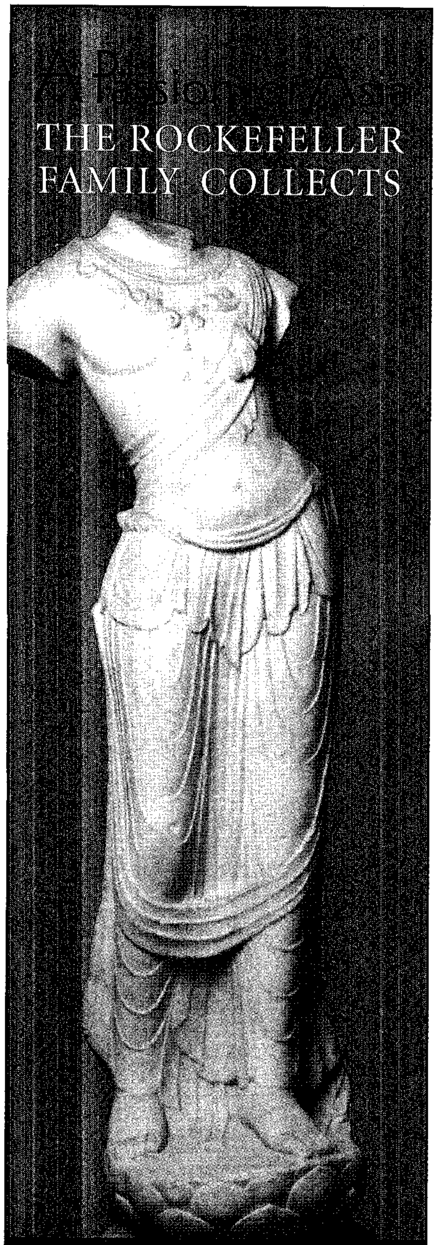

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Bodhisattva; China; Tang (618–907), first half of the 8th century; Collection of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Nelson A. Rockefeller bequest, Kykuit. Photo: John Bigelow Taylor

CONTRIBUTORS

John Seabrook ("Ruffled Feathers," p. 50), a staff writer, has published two books, "Deeper" and "Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing—The Marketing of Culture."

Jeffrey Goldberg ("Central Casting," p. 62) writes the Letter from Washington. His book "Prisoners: A Muslim and a Jew Across the Middle East Divide" will be published in October.

Benjamin Wallace-Wells ("Private Jihad," p. 28) is an editor of *The Washington Monthly.*

Elif Batuman ("The Ice Renaissance," p. 44) is a senior writer for *n+1.*

Thomas Mallon (Books, p. 79) is a novelist and critic. His novels include "Two Moons" and "Bandbox."

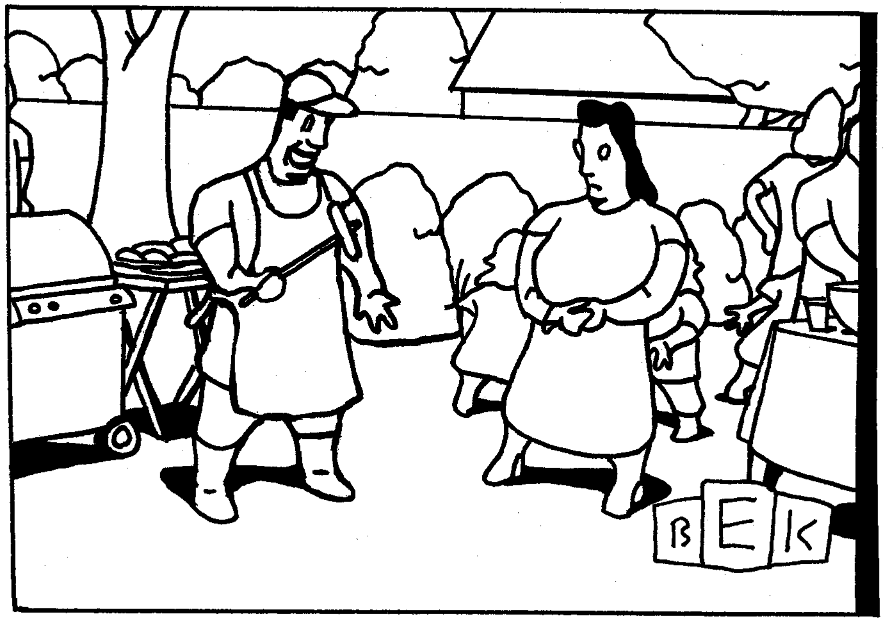
John Updike (Books, p. 84) is a regular contributor of fiction, poetry, and criticism. His new novel, "Terrorist," comes out next month.

Henry Roth (Fiction, p. 72), who died in 1995, published his first novel, "Call It Sleep," in 1934. Two volumes of his next, "Mercy of a Rude Stream," were published in 1994 and 1995, and two subsequent volumes came out after his death. "God the Novelist" appears courtesy of the Henry Roth Literary Property Trust.

Paul Goldberger (The Sky Line, p. 88) is the magazine's architecture critic.

Kate Julian (The Talk of the Town, p. 27) is a member of the magazine's editorial staff.

Stanley Kunitz (Poem, p. 56), who died on May 14th, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for "Selected Poems, 1928-1958," in 1959, and the National Book Award for "Passing Through: The Later Poems," in 1995. His final book, "The Wild Braid: A Poet Reflects on a Century in the Garden," was published last year. "Halley's Comet" first appeared in the magazine in the October 9, 1995, issue. ♦



"It's a cookout—act stupid!"

THE MAIL

REASONS OF GENDER

Malcolm Gladwell, in his review of Charles Tilly's book "Why?," might have noted that arguments about social status and the invocation of rules versus stories were part of an important debate about gender differences in moral development which raged twenty years ago (Books, April 10th). The psychologist Carol Gilligan, in her 1982 book "In a Different Voice," posited that women typically reject rigid moral conventions or codes, and instead tend to construct moral judgments in more storylike ways that aim to preserve social relations. Others have concluded that the major determinant of whether one invokes conventional or narrative reasons for conduct is relative power, which receives only scant attention in Gladwell's review.

Chris Wellin, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Sociology and Gerontology, Miami University
Oxford, Ohio

THE ORIGINS OF MEAT

Bill Buford writes that "people don't want to know what meat is" ("Carnal Knowledge," May 1st). I didn't want to, either. But eventually I realized that meat is a thinking, breathing, feeling animal, with a will to live, which is callously bred to be killed as soon as it is economically profitable to do so. Now that I know, I don't eat animals anymore. I can look them in the eye, honestly and in friendship, and I don't have to play games to arbitrate between my diet and my conscience.

Gary Loewenthal
Falls Church, Va.

At Everdale Place, an alternative boarding school in rural Ontario where I worked as a cook (it has since closed), we learned firsthand the value of raising our own food, from vegetables to pigs, cows, and chickens. The students would accompany the animals they'd raised since birth to the slaughterhouse; neatly wrapped parcels would then be returned, labelled with the animal's name: "Poppy's ribs," or "Poppy's liver." (There were exceptions: all of us treasured a pig, Gertrude, who, having survived a barn fire, was allowed to live out her natural life.) One year, I decided that we might try butchering our own beef cow, after it had been slaughtered and carved into sides. Interested staff members, a few students, and I spent about three days at a long wooden table in our farmhouse kitchen. We worked intently, laughed a lot, got sticky with blood and fat, slipped on the scraps. But we filled the freezer. While others became confirmed vegetarians after our butchering experience, I ate more meat and found repletion and intimacy in the way that pig and beef flesh became part of my own.

Vera B. Williams
New York City

CHOOSING THE END

Daniel Raeburn, in his moving account of his daughter's stillbirth, mentions that he and his wife were presented with only two choices once their baby's death in utero had been diagnosed—a Cesarean section or induced labor ("Vessels," May 1st). There is a third option that parents should be offered: the opportunity to let nature take its course and wait for labor to begin spontaneously. Not all parents find this choice comforting, or even bearable, but, for those who do, it is an important journey. The pregnancy has been theirs for nine months; how to end it should be within their control as well.

Perry-Lynn Moffitt
Chair, Pregnancy Loss Support Program
National Council of Jewish Women
New York Section
New York City

•

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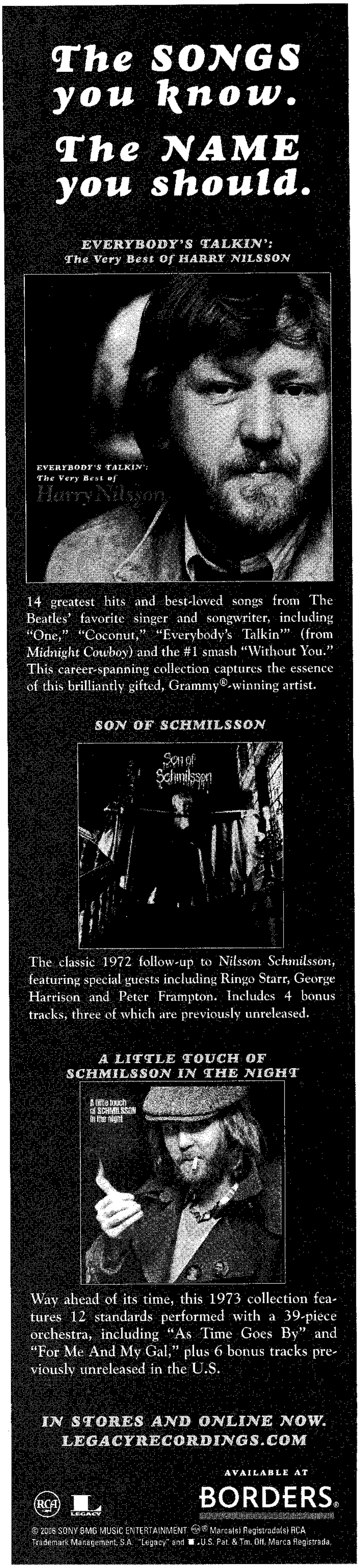

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
CLASS ACTS

Ensemble Studio Theatre stages its annual marathon of new one-act plays over the course of four weeks. Among the productions are "Bone China," by David Mamet, "The Other Woman," by David Ives, and "The Sissy Letters: Numbers 14, 29, and 47," by Stephen Adly Guirgis. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
NORTH COUNTRY

Howe Gelb, the longtime leader of the Arizona-based Western-rock outfit Giant Sand, recently travelled to Ottawa, where he recorded an inspired (and inspirational) solo album, " 'Sno Angel Like You," which pairs Gelb's distinctive songwriting and vocals with the Voices of Praise gospel choir. He brings the choir to the Bowery Ballroom this week. (See page 10.)

ART
FLATTER SPATTER

"No Limits, Just Edges: Jackson Pollock Paintings on Paper" may force a shift in perceptions of the Action painter: on a smaller scale, his Ab Ex swagger registers as more delicate and intimate. The show, which is divided into four sections—ranging from Pollock's earliest sketches to late, experimental works—opens at the Guggenheim this week. (See page 11.)

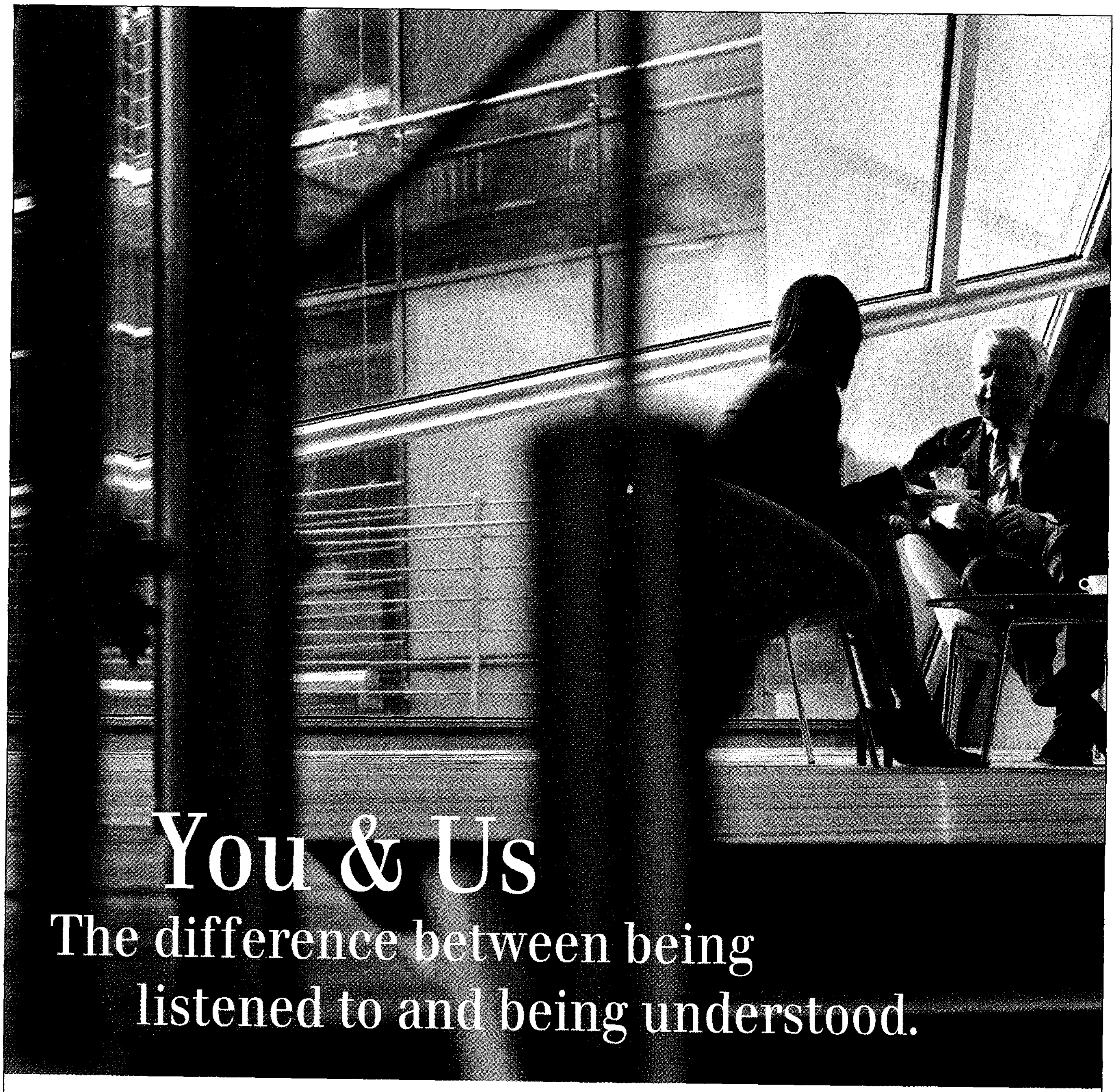
CLASSICAL MUSIC
AID AND COMFORT

"Succor," a contemporary-music performance series at the Whitney's Altria branch, offers "Locus Solus: Prelude," a world première from the composer Phil Kline that was inspired by Raymond Roussel's magical pre-Surrealist novel, featuring the violinist Todd Reynolds. (See page 16.)

MOVIES
ACTION!

Conceptual gag or art object? Sometimes it's hard to tell in the post-Warhol era. Sharon Lockhart's film "Pine Flat," featured at Sundance in 2006 and now playing at the Walter Reade Theatre, is as high-concept as the season's high-octane blockbusters, offering twelve ten-minute-long static takes of nearly static children photographed amidst the splendors of nature. (See page 20.)

Meryl Streep and a dummy, in Laurie Simmons's film, "The Music of Regret." Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THE GREAT BETWEEN

On May 6, Grant McLennan, one of two songwriters in the Australian band the Go-Betweens, died of a heart attack at his home in Brisbane, at the age of forty-eight. Though they formed the band in 1978, in the punk era, McLennan and his writing partner, Robert Forster, created an aesthetic that had little to do with volume, speed, or noise. They wrote plainspoken, serious, and intentionally literate pop songs that rarely cracked wise or hollered out loud. McLennan's gorgeous song "Cattle and Cane," from 1983, was voted by the Australasian Performing Right Association as one of the greatest modern Australian songs. The song is neither loud nor soft. It maintains a tension that it decides never to release. A simple but oddly timed motif is played in unison by guitar, bass, and kick drum. McLennan pauses between words, flickering between melancholy and a sense of wonder that we can remember things to be melancholy about: "I recall a boy in bigger pants / Like everyone just waiting for a chance / His father's watch, he left it in the showers / From time to time / The waste, memory wastes."

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

ERIK T. JOHNSON

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ALL THAT FALL
A rare staging of Samuel Beckett's radio play about a woman who surprises her blind husband at the train station on his birthday. John Sowle directs. Preview on May 24. Opens May 25. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-868-4444.)

BURLEIGH GRIME$
Wendie Malick and Mark Moses star in a new comedy by Roger Kirby, about a Wall Street up-and-comer. With music by David Yazbek. David Warren directs. In previews. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

DARK YELLOW
Studio Dante presents a world première of a noir drama by Julia Jordan, which centers on a murder in a cornfield. Nick Sandow directs. Previews begin May 24. Opens May 27. (257 W. 29th St. 212-868-4444.)

ENSEMBLE STUDIO THEATRE'S MARATHON 2006
The twenty-eighth annual festival of new one-act plays includes eleven premières and work by David Mamet, Stephen Adly Guirgis, Will Eno, and Amy Fox. May 23-June 25. (Ensemble Studio Theatre, 549 W. 52nd St. 212-352-3101.)

THE FIELD
The Irish Repertory Theatre presents John B. Keane's drama, about a farmer fighting for the land he has nurtured. Directed by Ciarán O'Reilly. In previews. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

THE HOUSE IN TOWN
Richard Greenberg's new play examines the marriage of a couple living on Millionaires' Row in Manhattan in 1929. Doug Hughes directs. Previews begin May 24. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

SATELLITES
Michael Greif directs a new play by Diana Son, about an interracial couple who move into a gentrifying Brooklyn neighborhood. The ensemble cast includes Sandra Oh. Previews begin May 30. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

SOME GIRL(S)
Maura Tierney, Eric McCormack, and Fran Drescher star in a new play by Neil LaBute, about a man who visits four former girlfriends before getting engaged. Directed by Jo Bonney. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

SPRING AWAKENING
Atlantic Theatre Company presents the world première of a new musical adapted from Frank Wedekind's novel about the secret lives of teenagers. With music by Duncan Sheik and book and lyrics by Steven Sater. Michael Mayer directs. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

STOPPING TRAFFIC
The Vineyard presents the world première of a one-woman show written by and starring Mary Pat Gleason. Lonny Price directs. Previews begin May 24. (108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

THE WATER'S EDGE
Kate Burton, Tony Goldwyn, Mamie Gummer, Austin Lysy, and Katharine Powell star in a new play by Theresa Rebeck, in which a woman and her children are paid an unwelcome visit by her ex-husband. Directed by Will Frears. In previews. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

NOW PLAYING

ALL DOLLED UP
Colin Quinn and Working Stiff Productions present a new comedy by Bobby Spillane, based on the true story of a cross-dressing gangster. Susan Campanaro directs. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

ANNULLA
The energetic Annulla (Eileen De Felitta), a seventy-four-year-old Holocaust survivor, bustles around her London kitchen, cooking soup and sharing volatile confidences with an unseen interviewer, Emily, whose thoughts take the form of intermittent voice-overs (recorded by Neva Small). As she did in "Having Our Say," Emily Mann weaves a play from real-life reminiscences. The title character's meandering recollections span everything from her attempt to save her husband from Dachau in the late nineteen-thirties by assuming an Aryan identity to her life in London in the seventies, when she wrote a six-hour autobiographical play about matriarchy. One can't help but wish that these two thoughtful women would have a real-time conversation instead of alternating soliloquies. Pamela Hall directs. (Theatre at St. Luke's, 308 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

BILLY CONNOLLY LIVE!
By his own admission, the Scottish funnyman's newest standup show is "not jointed very well"—in fact, it's crammed to the hilt, with cuss-filled rants on everything from religious fanaticism to the miraculous and gooey details of snail copulation, all delivered in that irresistible Glaswegian brogue. But it's due to his madly digressive style ("I used to think I was fecking brilliant until someone pointed out to me I had A.D.D.") that Connolly is able to keep his audience guffawing for two lung-exhausting hours. If his fan base hasn't quite ignited here, as it has in other parts of the world, it ought to. (37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100.)

CAGELOVE
The new drama directed by Adam Rapp and written by Christopher Denham has marked similarities to Rapp's current "Red Light Winter" (in which Denham portrays the Rapp-like playwright): three characters, a love-triangle plot, and disturbing sexual undercurrents. But Denham's characters, who read Freud but summarize like Dr. Phil, feel hastily sketched and inconsistent; their behavior is inexplicably vicious. A raped woman, her icy sister, and her bitter fiancé are the architects of a roundelay of betrayal, abuse, and suffering so grim you think it couldn't get any uglier—until the final scene hits, like a cheap sucker punch to the gut. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

COLUMBINUS
This drama, conceived and directed by P. J. Paparelli, examines the psychology of American high-school students. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

HERAKLES VIA PHAEDRA
Ellen Stewart's adaptation intertwines the two myths and sets them in the Roaring Twenties. (LaMama Annex, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

LEE EVANS
The British comedian comes to 37 Arts with a new standup act. (450 W. 37th St. 212-560-8912.)

NO CHILD . . .
Nilaja Sun's astounding one-woman performance piece is based on her own experiences teaching in a tough New York City high school while juggling problems with the I.R.S. and getting the back rent to her landlord. Taking on a number of roles—a disaffected student, a surly security guard, a school administrator, and a no-nonsense teacher, among others—Sun, who is half Puerto Rican, half black, exposes the hypocrisy from which the play takes its name. By showing us how the other half lives, Sun and her passionate, committed director, Hal Brooks, provide an object lesson in what should not be missing from any life curriculum: hope. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/22/06.) (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

NOT A GENUINE BLACK MAN
When the writer-performer Brian Copeland was eight, his mother left her brutal husband, Sylvester, and moved her family to San Leandro, a segregated white California suburb, not anticipating the harassment that they would face from landlords, neighbors, and police. Interwoven with the story of how the family survived (with some lessons in Realpolitik from Alabama-bred Grandma) there are effective glimpses of Copeland as a

grownup: a successful family man who defies the sorry stereotypes that constitute "realness" for a black man. As directed by Bob Balaban, this one-man show has a motormouth verbal energy and an appealing emotional honesty. Copeland moves past the distracting rhythms of standup comedy early in the show to let his gift for ambiguity take over. (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE RACE

Gecko presents a highly physical theatre piece about a man preparing to meet his first child. Part of the "Brits Off Broadway" series. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SHINING CITY

As a grieving widower, John, in the Irish playwright Conor McPherson's new drama (a Manhattan Theatre Club production at the Biltmore), Oliver Platt talks a blue streak. John has come to a priest turned therapist named Ian (Brían F. O'Byrne), who he hopes will help him cope with his guilt and anguish over the recent loss of his wife. While both Platt and Martha Plimpton, as Ian's girlfriend, are excellent in their roles, it's O'Byrne who has the hardest job technically: he must hold up a mirror to two confused souls without conveying his own character's confusion in their presence. He makes Ian a compelling cipher. Despite the actors' hard work and their illuminating presence, however, "Shining City" is not much of a play. McPherson fails to engage the audience; he doesn't even annoy. Still, one is grateful to the director, Robert Falls, for having assembled this cast. (5/22/06) (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

TARZAN

Disney's version of Edgar Rice Burroughs's classic story comes to Broadway. Bob Crowley directs. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.)

TROIKA: GOD, TOLSTOY AND SOPHIA

This drama by Peter Levy tells of the last days of Leo Tolstoy. (13th Street Repertory, 50 W. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

TROUT STANLEY

The American première of a drama by Claudia Dey, about twin girls living in the Canadian wild. Jen Wineman directs. (Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-868-4444.)

WAITING FOR GODOT

Classical Theatre of Harlem presents Samuel Beckett's masterpiece. Christopher McElroen directs. (HSA Theatre, 645 St. Nicholas Ave., near 141st St. 212-868-4444.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AWAKE AND SING!:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **BRIDGE & TUNNEL:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **CORTEO:** Randall's Island Park. 800-678-5440. **THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. **FAITH HEALER:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE HISTORY BOYS:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **JACQUES BREL IS ALIVE AND WELL AND LIVING IN PARIS:** Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 212-239-6200. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **LANDSCAPE OF THE BODY:** Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-352-3101. Through May 28. **THE LIEUTENANT OF INISHMORE:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **THE PAJAMA GAME:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **RED LIGHT WINTER:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **A SPALDING GRAY MATTER:** Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through May 27. **STUFF HAPPENS:** Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200. **SWEENEY TODD:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THREE DAYS OF RAIN:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE THREEPENNY OPERA:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. **TRYST:** Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **THE WEDDING SINGER:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—May 24: The German death-metal band **Caliban** and Queens' own **Sworn Enemy.** May 25: **Lee (Scratch) Perry,** the notorious reggae eccentric, produced hits by Bob Marley and the Wailers; Gregory Isaacs; his own band, the Upsetters; and the Clash. In 2003, he won a Grammy for his album "Jamaican ET," and he has a new release, "Panic in Babylon," featuring contributions by TV on the Radio, Sinéad O'Connor, Moby, George Clinton, and others. May 30: Dancehall reggae with **Yellowman.**

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—May 24: **Mark Kozelek,** the soft-spoken songwriter formerly

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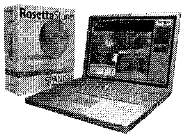

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of the impossibly delicate act Red House Painters and currently of the band Sun Kil Moon, performs solo, showcasing his quiet delivery and his taste for other musicians' material—he's covered everything from John Denver and AC/DC to Modest Mouse. May 26: **Soul Position** (see Southpaw). May 27: **Howe Gelb** is a native of Pennsylvania, but his musical tastes come from a different place, about twenty-five hundred miles to the southwest. For the past two decades he's led the sun-scorched garage-rock ensemble Giant Sand. Lately, his solo career has taken him even farther afield. He recorded his new release, " 'Sno Angel Like You," with the Voices of Praise, a gospel ensemble from Ottawa. The approach is still deeply rootsy (a few Giant Sand songs are covered), but the sound is much richer.

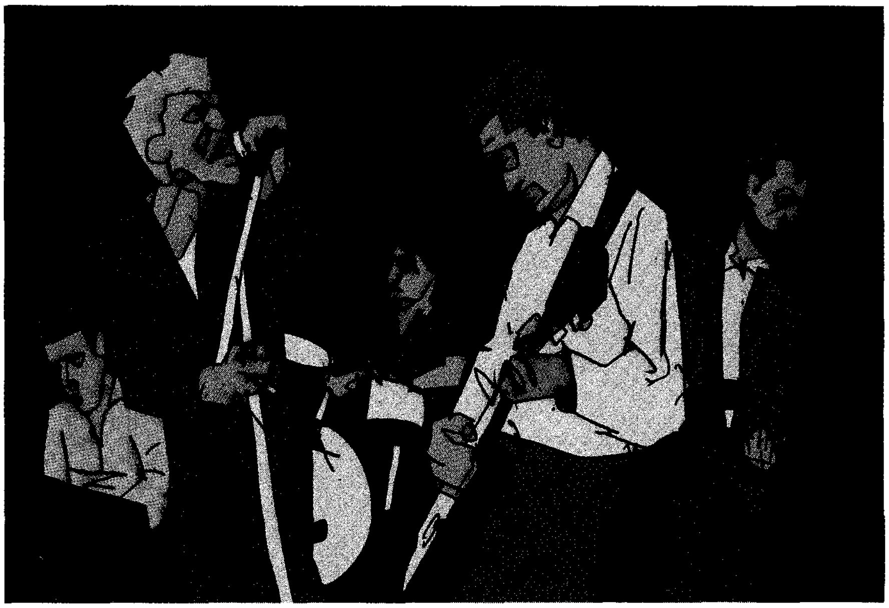
BOWERY POETRY CLUB
308 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (212-614-0505)—Thursdays, starting May 25: **Andy Friedman,** an illustrator and cartoonist who contributes to this magazine, settles in for a ten-week residency at the adventurous East Village club. Friedman started his stage career a few years ago, as a spoken-word artist who toured bars and delivered a set of monologues about the blues, folksingers, and his life while playing a slide show of his drawings and photographs. More recently, he has given in to his passion for country music, singing with the help of a backing band, the Other Failures, and some shrewd harmonizing. His stand at the club last summer resulted in his first album, "Live at the Bowery Poetry Club."

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—May 24: The Birmingham, England, reggae group **Steel Pulse** has turned out more than a dozen albums during the past two decades (its most recent, from 2004, is "African Holocaust"). The band is best experienced live, when the vocalist David Hinds converts even the most strident polemic into a party. May 30: The neo-soul singer **Leela James.**

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—May 26-28: **Howard Fishman's** "Basement Tapes Project." On July 29, 1966, Bob Dylan crashed his Triumph motorcycle while riding near Woodstock, in upstate New York. While recovering from the accident, he rented a house and recorded with The Band a large slate of folk, blues, and original songs that became bootlegged, mythologized, and eventually available, nearly a decade later, on a double album, "The Basement Tapes." Fishman, a gravelly-voiced singer and guitarist adept at delivering small-group swing as well as indie rock, is tackling the sixty-odd songs attributed to those sessions. The first night, called "The Old, Weird America," after Greil Marcus's book about the recordings, looks at the songs' roots. The second evening covers the unreleased material. And the final night is devoted to the official album. Starting May 28: The vocalist **Nellie McKay,** who is currently on Broadway in "The Threepenny Opera," starts a four-week Sunday-night residency.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—May 24: A night of contrasting sounds. The early act is the lovely **Bedroom Walls.** This Los Angeles outfit plays what it calls "romanticore," a dreamy and engaging form of art pop. Later that night, the Canadian acts **Frog Eyes** and **Sunset Rubdown** descend for some glorious mayhem. The hyperenergetic vocalist Carey Mercer, known for yelping, shouting, and otherwise animating his delivery, fronts Frog Eyes. He's supported by a pianist, a bassist, and a drummer—Melanie Campbell, his wife. Sunset Rubdown is a side project of Spencer Krug, keyboardist, singer, and songwriter for the celebrated Montreal band Wolf Parade. Sunset started out as a lo-fi solo effort, but for its début album, "Shut Up I Am Dreaming," Krug pulled together a band that includes the vocalist Camilla Wynne Ingr, formerly of Pony Up! The music is vast and varied, ranging from midway-esque riffs to headphone-ready rock.

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—May 26: Led by the brothers Jean and Richard Shepherd, New York City's **Radio Mundial** (World Radio) fuses Latin rhythms, funk, soul, and reggae into a soundtrack for summer nights of dancing in the street. May 27: The m.c. Blueprint and the producer RJD2 have been friends since their childhood, in Columbus, Ohio. Together they perform and record as the underground hip-hop outfit **Soul Position.** They're in town with a new album, "Things Go Better with RJ and Al," which delivers a critique of mainstream hip-hop, a lament about the price of personal freedom, and a confession about making bad romantic decisions after drinking too much Jägermeister, among other things.



The Walkmen kick off a national tour with a show at Webster Hall on May 24.

JEROEN KOOLHAAS

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—May 24: The **Walkmen** made their recording début in 2002, with the album "Everyone Who Pretended to Like Me Is Gone." Part of this decade's New York City rock revival, the group distinguished itself on many fronts: the sweetly abrasive vocals of the front man, Hamilton Leithauser; the use of organ and piano; and its urbane, literary-salon aesthetic. The Walkmen's second album, "Bows and Arrows," landed them an appearance on "The O.C." and slots atop many critics' year-end lists. This show kicks off a national tour and marks the release of their fine third record, "A Hundred Miles Off," which finds two of the players in the band (Walter Martin, the organist, and Pete Bauer, the bassist) swapping instruments and the band as a whole reaching into more ambitious territory. As if all this activity weren't enough, the players are working on a group novel, "John's Journey," which they expect to complete by 2010.

ZANKEL HALL
Carnegie Hall, 57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—The Route 57 Festival, celebrating a broad cross-section of traditional American music, gets under way on May 22 with the Cape Breton fiddler **Natalie MacMaster** and the sixties folk-revival singer **Norman Kennedy.** The New Orleans pianist **Henry Butler** and the blues guitarist **Corey Harris** play the following night. May 24: The topnotch bluegrass picker **Del McCoury,** who is about to release his first album of gospel music, splits the bill with the local ensemble **Ollabelle.** The festival closes May 25 with the "sacred steel" gospel of the **Campbell Brothers** and the folk and blues guitarist **Chris Smither.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—May 24-27: Take two early fusion heroes—the guitarist **John Abercrombie** and the drummer **Lenny White**—mix them with a venerable bass virtuoso, **Eddie Gomez,** and add a clarinet player with inclusive tendencies, **Don Byron,** and you get the confidently named Super Group.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Over a forty-year career, the guitarist **Taj Mahal** has become nearly as venerated as the legendary bluesmen he modelled himself after. He's here with his trio May 23-28.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through June 3: The British vocal stylist **Maria Friedman** takes the stage in the Café Carlyle for a program of Stephen Sondheim songs. ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **Loston Harris** is in attendance.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—May 23-28: The **Bill Charlap** trio is about as good as mainstream piano jazz gets these days. Working with the bassist **Peter Washington** and the drummer **Kenny Washington,** Charlap displays the poise and taste, and, increasingly, the depth of such grand stylists as Hank Jones and the late Tommy Flanagan.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—May 25-28: **Bud Shank** was once the epitome of West Coast cool saxophone, but by middle age, he had embraced his inner bebopper and had evolved into an impressively aggressive improviser. To celebrate his eightieth birthday, he's assembled a supporting trio worth hearing on its own—the pianist **Bill Mays,** the bassist **Ray Drummond,** and the drummer **Tim Horner.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—May 25-28: The versatile and perennially underrated pianist and composer **Roger Kellaway** adds **Stefon Harris,** the most formidable vibraphonist of his generation, to his trio.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—May 27: The **George Cables Project.** Sterling hard bop from two veterans, the pianist Cables and the saxophonist **Gary Bartz,** and two younger players sure to keep them on their toes, the bassist **Derrick Hodge** and the drummer **Jeff (Tain) Watts.**

TRIBECA PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
199 Chambers St. (212-220-1460)—May 26: The

"Lost Jazz Shrines" series honoring Café Bohemia continues, with the organists **Dr. Lonnie Smith** and **Reuben Wilson** in a program dedicated to the late master of the hard-bop organ, Jimmy Smith.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—May 23-28: The pianist **Robert Glasper** is young enough to have grown up in an age inundated with hip-hop, and he's a technically assured player who's eager to include those sounds in his material. Backed by the like-minded bassist **Vicente Archer** and the drummer **Damion Reid,** Glasper pulls off the blend of jazz and hip-hop better than most. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Girodet: Romantic Rebel,"** a retrospective of paintings and works on paper by the French artist Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson (1767-1824). Opens May 24. ♦ **"The Art of Betty Woodman,"** a retrospective of ceramic pieces from throughout the artist's career. Through July 30. ♦ **"Cai Guo-Qiang on the Roof: Transparent Monument."** The roof garden has reopened for the summer, with four sculptural works by the Chinese-born artist. Among them are "Clear Sky Black Cloud," a timed gunpowder explosion that produces a small cloud of smoke over Central Park each day at noon. Through Oct. 29. ♦ **"Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh."** Through July 9. ♦ **"Samuel Palmer: Vision and Landscape."** A major retrospective of the Romantic-era landscape painter Samuel Palmer (1805-81). Through May 29. ♦ **"Kara Walker at the Met: After the Deluge."** Through July 30. ♦ **"Anglo-Mania: Tradition and Transgression in British Fashion"** fills the English period galleries with mannequins dressed in costumes old and new, transforming the rooms into elaborate surreal tableaux. Mods mingle with dandies at a hunt ball, punks mix it up with dames in a drawing room, and the show as a whole conveys the interconnectedness and the bizarreness of both class and fashion. Through Sept. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Against the Grain: Contemporary Art from the Edward R. Broida Collection."** Broida donated a hundred and seventy-five works to MOMA before his death, more than half of which are on display in the museum's contemporary galleries. Four artists—Vija Celmins, Ken Price, Philip Guston, and Christopher Wilmarth—earn their own in-depth examinations. Through July 10. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"No Limits, Just Edges: Jackson Pollock Paintings on Paper"** opens May 26. ♦ Selections from the permanent collection are on display. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

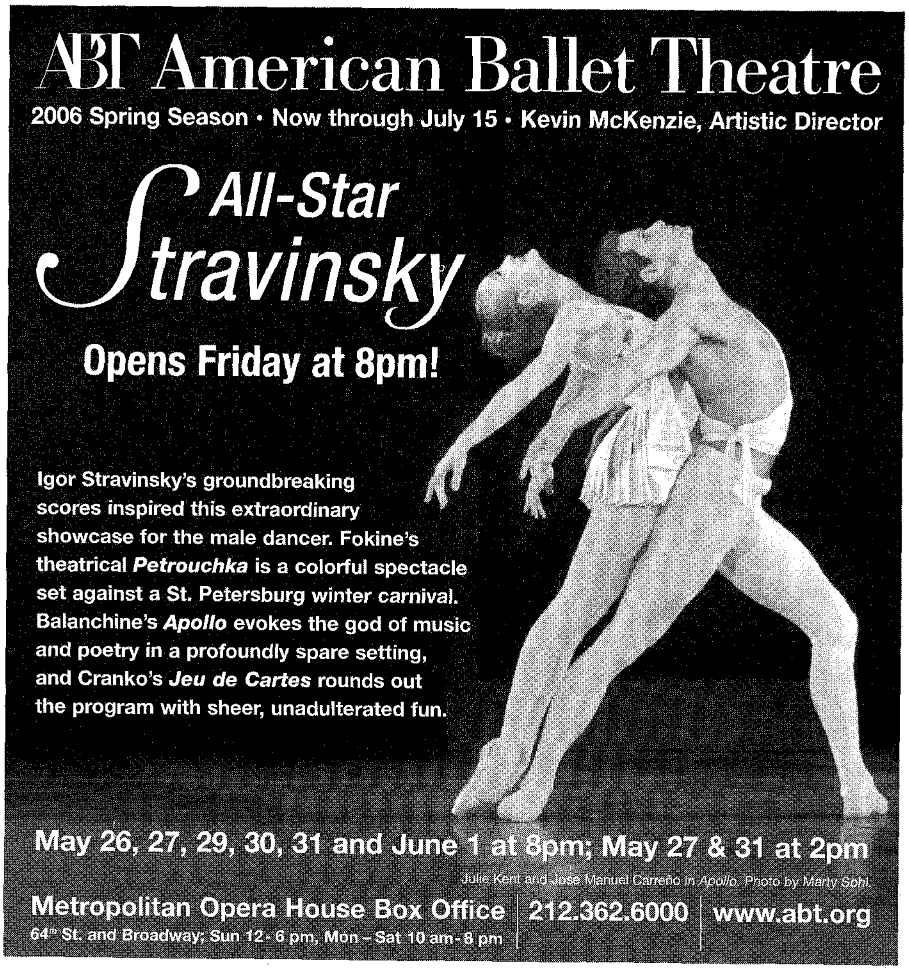
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—Philippe Vergne and Chrissie Iles curated **"Day for Night,"** the 2006 Biennial. More than a hundred artists are represented, including Pierre Huyghe, Marilyn Minter, Sturtevant, and Troy Brauntuch. Through May 28. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"William Wegman: Funney/Strange."** This major retrospective goes beyond clever, anthropomorphic photographs of Weimaraners (though those are here, too) with forty years of the artist's paintings, drawings, videos, and films. Through May 28. ♦ **"Symphonic Poem: The Art of Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson."** Through Aug. 13. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Darwin"** traces the discoveries and influence of the great naturalist (1809-82) with, among other things, a re-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Julie Kent and Jose Manuel Carreño in *Apollo*. Photo by Marty Sohl.

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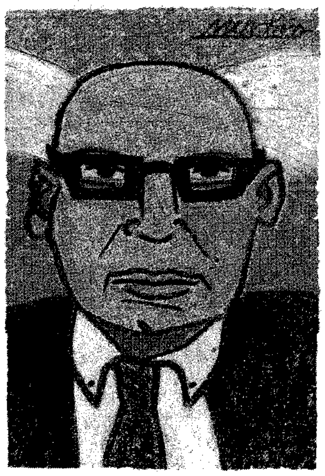
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
AGE, WITH GRACE

Today's longevity tip: to stay sharp into your nineties, write gnarly atonal music. As Elliott Carter nears his centennial, Milton Babbitt has just turned ninety, and both are composing prolifically. Two things are not widely known about Babbitt, the master of the twelve-tone row. One, he is a joy to be around, recalling events with photographic precision, firing off jokes with Jack Benny timing, discoursing on movies and popular song. Two, his music is more playful and alive than its premises would lead one to believe. His recent "Concerti," written for the Boston Symphony, is a thing of jokes and sighs, of insolent bass-trombone solos and crypto-Romantic murmurings of strings. On May 10, Carnegie Hall celebrated Babbitt with a concert drawn from five of his nine decades. "Canonical Form," played by Robert Taub, showed the composer at his hyperkinetic best. If it were put on a record titled "Babbitt at Birdland," it might be mistaken for the headiest jazz since Thelonious Monk.



—*Alex Ross*

creation of his study, samples of fossils he collected, and live specimens of tortoises, frogs, and iguanas like those that he encountered in the Galápagos Islands. Through Aug. 20. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory."** Through June 23. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

DRAWING CENTER

35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—**"Eva Hesse: Drawing."** See the Jewish Museum listing for details. Through July 15. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—Two great shows about five miles apart—**"Eva Hesse: Sculpture"** uptown, **"Eva Hesse: Drawing"** downtown—add up to an overdue New York retrospective for the lyrical post-minimalist, who died of cancer in 1970, at the age of thirty-four. At the Jewish Museum, works in fibreglass, latex, and other then-innovative materials evoke a moment, in the late sixties, when "white cube" gallery space became the test chamber for a revolution in aesthetics. (A section of documents, photos, and films movingly explores Hesse's short, hard, luminous life, begun in a family that barely escaped the Holocaust.) The Drawing Center show evinces an unsuspected range of ideas and talents—including a superb painterly touch—that brims with the tragically unfulfilled promise of a majestic career. At the Jewish Museum through Sept. 17. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, Thursdays, 11 to 9, and Fridays, 11 to 3. For the duration of the Hesse show, the museum will also be open on Saturdays, from 11 to 5:45, with no charge for admission.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—The midtown oasis has reopened after almost three years of renovation and a Renzo Piano expansion. It marks the occasion with **"Masterworks from the Morgan,"** a selection of manuscripts, drawings, books, and seals from the collections. Manuscripts in the Brontë siblings' tiny handwriting, a libretto of "Aida" annotated by Verdi, and Picasso's pen-and-ink portrait of Marie-Thérèse Walter are among the items on display. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—The Academy's hundred-and-eighty-first annual Invitational Exhibition of Contemporary Art is a smorgasbord of works by a hundred and twenty-four diverse artists, among them Tom Burkhardt, Alison Saar, Alexi Worth, Kiki Smith, Pat Steir, Lee Walton, Thomas Nozkowski, Alan Wiener, Steven Holl, Tony Feher, and Cordy Ryman. Through June 18. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—**"Holy Madness: Portraits of Tantric Siddhas."** Through Sept. 4. ♦ **"Take to the Sky: Flying Mystics in Himalayan Art."** Through Jan. 8. (Open Mondays and Thursdays, 11 to 5, Wednesdays, 11 to 7, Fridays, 11 to 10, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction 1964-1980"** is a fragmentary sampling rather than a comprehensive survey, but it nonetheless demonstrates how varied sixties and seventies abstraction actually was. Among the artists are Sam Gilliam, Tom Lloyd, William T. Williams, and Howardena Pindell. Through July 2. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

SARAH SZE

Those familiar with Sze's sprawling, expansive, and delicate installations might wonder how they would translate to the great outdoors, where walls don't confine her and intrepid art tourists tread freely. Sze

RICHARD MERKIN

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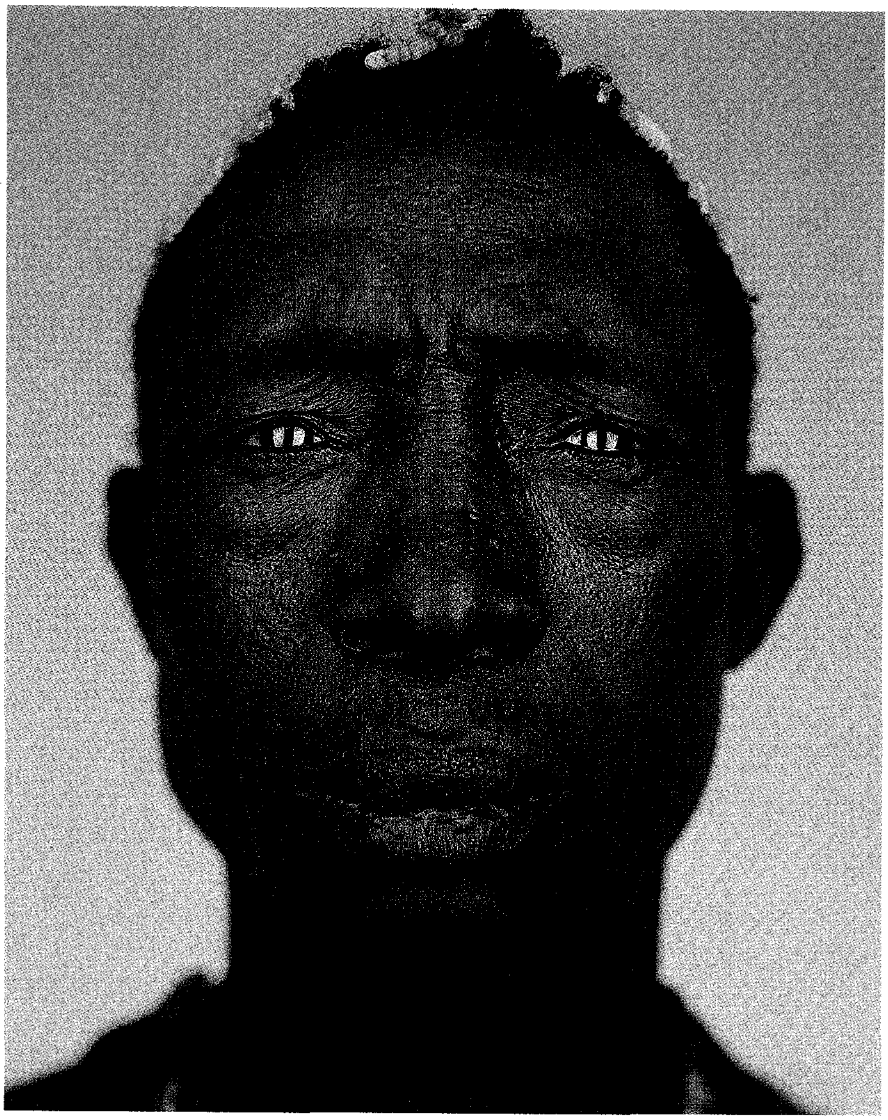

"Thomas, 2005," by Martin Schoeller, at Hasted Hunt.

has solved the problem cleverly by arranging her materials—a customary gathering of dime-store objects and Home Depot supplies—into a brick-and-glass structure that juts out of the sidewalk like the prow of a sunken ship. The irregular pyramid, built into the pavement, also mimics the sharp angled architecture of a postwar building across the street, creating a visual rhyme. Sze's work generally gains its power through a sublime accretion of banal objects. Here, her impulse is also to protect and preserve, by placing her work in a bunker and letting us peer in. Through Oct. 22. (Public Art Fund, Doris C. Freedman Plaza, 60th St. at Fifth Ave. 212-980-4575.)

Short List

JAMES LEE BYARS: Michael Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623; and Mary Boone, 745 Fifth Ave. 212-752-2929. Through June 24. **WILLEM DE KOONING:** L&M, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020. Through June 3. **JUAN MUÑOZ:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through June 10. **ANTONI TÀPIES:** PaceWildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292. Through June 30.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

EMILY EVELETH

The jelly doughnut is Eveleth's sole subject in this series of paintings and charcoal drawings, but she wrings an opera's worth of desire and revulsion from the simple form. The fleshy, butter-tinged pastry is reminiscent of the thighs of a Rubens nude, but limp with the weight of fry grease and nearing collapse; smears of red jelly emerging from holes poked by pastry bags careen toward the obscene. One never really imagines eating Wayne Thiebaud's concoctions, but Eveleth's sensual images, which have more in common with Will Cotton's Candyland-scapes, may set off cravings for Krispy Kremes. Some may experience a powerful olfactory hallucination on entering the gallery; others, an urge to diet. Through May 26. (Danese, 535 W. 24th St. 212-223-2227.)

THOMAS HELBIG

This young German artist's stormy works promise a bit more than they deliver. Oil-on-wood panel paintings conjure Bacon, Gorky, and Frankenthaler, in varying measures; despite some admirable color choices, they can feel surprisingly depthless. His black painted sculptures, a little flimsy looking, depict forms of bodies and architectural details emerging from a foam of scrubby shapes; they're the result of Frankenstein meldings of broken pottery figures and statuettes scavenged from flea markets. The show is nonetheless seductive, and leaves one curious as to what will come next. Through June 17. (Bortolami Dayan, 510 W. 25th St. 212-727-2050.)

ILYA AND EMILIA KABAKOV

The husband-and-wife installation-art team have in the past depicted eerily empty orphanages and museums from which the art has been banished; this time, they create an installation dedicated to the work of a fictional Soviet artist named I. Kabakov. Painting in the early nineteen-seventies, under duress yet at monumental scale, the Kabakovs' namesake is shown to have favored tight sketches of standard socialist-realist subjects—tanks rolling along a brutalist boulevard, muscled peasants laughing in the woods—juxtaposed against brooding Ab Ex backgrounds. The fantasy is provocative; too bad the paintings aren't a bit more exciting. Through June 3. (Sean Kelly, 528 W. 29th St. 212-239-1181.)

HONG LEI

In a show titled "Transmitting the Ancient," this Chinese artist pokes gentle fun at traditional still-life painting and the objects of Zen contemplation. Layering artifice upon artifice, he photographs pine, bamboo, or pomegranate branches hanging from threads against blank white studio backdrops and surrounded by a constellation of suspended fake flies and butterflies. Other still-lifes, in muted black-and-white, zero in on individual objects: a mushroom, a lotus pod, a stuffed turtledove, a tiny silver carp, a branch with plum blossoms. Part satire, part homage, the work is witty, charming, and shrewdly understated. Through June 3. (Chambers, 210 Eleventh Ave. 212-414-1169.)

PAUL ETIENNE LINCOLN

Alchemy, archaic technology, popular music, and the city are brought together in a conceptually complicated but delightful project. The centerpiece of "New York New York" is an elaborate machine—not actually on view—that Lincoln built over the past sixteen years to create a onetime, sixty-hour performance in a water tunnel under Manhattan. Documents and diagrams describing the project line the walls; forty-eight records of opera music and city sounds—the yet-unscheduled performance's mainstay—accompany it. Lincoln's scholarly-nostalgic aesthetic pays tribute to everyone from John Philip Sousa (with a specially constructed "Sousaphonograph") to the nineteenth-century mathematician Charles Babbage. His methods also recall Duchamp's science-y schematics, although Lincoln goes beyond spoofing a theory to actually build his. Through June 21. (Burgin, 243 W. 18th St. 212-462-2668.)

HIRAKI SAWA

A London-based Japanese artist adopts the English penchant, à la Beatrix Potter and Lewis Carroll, for making quiet domestic interiors come surrealistically alive. In Sawa's three-channel video, little animated rocking horses maneuver their way around an English country home, up curtains, and through a shag-rug snowscape and a lake of bathwater, accompanied by Dale Berning's burbling electronic score, which emphasizes Sawa's slow, gentle pace. With its visionary imagery, the video bears some resemblance to Buñuel's brasher surrealist film "Un Chien Andalou." Sawa's work is much more staid, though, revelling in a not uncomfortable marriage of traditional English reserve with the Zen stillness of his native culture's art. Through June 3. (James Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.)

GARY SIMMONS

Simmons's trademark is the billboard-size "chalkboard" drawing, a haunting white-on-black image blurred by what appear to be partial erasures (actually, they're painted on, and fixed). He moves into color for the first time here, with three huge, horizontal works centered on icons from 1964. The monumental circular towers from the World's Fair in Flushing Meadows seem to whirl against a bright-blue ground; Philip Johnson's ultra-modernist New York State Pavilion, also built for the Fair, glows on electric green, and the chandelier from Hitchcock's "Marnie" sets up a visual rattle against hot, primary red. They're undeniably nice to look at, largely because of their unabashed involvement in the narcotic visual idioms of nostalgia and advertising. Through May 26. (Bohen Foundation, 415 W. 13th St. 212-414-4575.)

ROSALIND SOLOMON

Like Diane Arbus and Lisette Model (who was Solomon's, as well as Arbus's, teacher), Solomon makes no apparent effort to ingratiate herself with either her subjects or her viewers. The twenty-two black-and-white portraits in her welcome new show were made between 1974 and 2000 and share an inquisitive, almost anthropological approach that is determinedly unsentimental but not unsympathetic. She regards a young man whose face is splotched with the lesions of Kaposi's sarcoma, a pregnant panhandler, a gaggle of grayhaired Princeton alumni, and several remarkable children with a volatile mix of caution and concern. Through June 3. (Foley, 547 W. 27th St. 212-244-9081.)

Short List

JAMES LEE BYARS: Rubenstein, 527 W. 23rd St., 526 W. 24th St., and 534 W. 24th St. 212-627-8000; and Mary Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 212-752-2929. Through June 24. **JEAN DUBUFFET / JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT:** Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through June 17. **JENNY HOLZER:** Lambert, 564 W. 25th St. 212-242-3611; and Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through June 17. **LORETTA LUX:** Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370. Through June 24. **MARTIN SCHOELLER:** Hasted Hunt, 529 W. 20th St. 212-627-0006. Opens May 25. **RICHARD SERRA:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through Aug. 11. **LAURIE SIMMONS / ANDREW GRASSIE:** Sperone Westwater, 415 W. 13th St. 212-999-7337. Through June 30. **BETTY WOODMAN:** Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 212-633-6999. Through May 27.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

HERB RITTS
Ritts, the popular fashion and celebrity photographer who died in 2002, worked in a chic, sleek, high-impact style that owed a lot to the nineteen-thirties neoclassicism of Horst and Hoyningen-Huene. Because Robert Mapplethorpe was borrowing from the same sources, he and Ritts have rigor and restraint in common, especially when the subject is the male nude. But, on the evidence of the more than forty pictures here, Ritts was more playful, less fetishistic, and not quite as emotionally chilled out. Like Mapplethorpe, he can turn his pumped-up subjects into statuary, but he's not at a loss when they come to life. Through June 10. (Wessel & O'Connor, 111 Front St. 718-596-1700.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
This week, N.Y.C.B. premières Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux's new ballet for the company, "Two Birds with the Wings of One," featuring the powerful ballerina Sofiane Sylve and her understated partner, Sébastien Marcovici. Set to three pieces—including two for soprano and chamber orchestra—by the company's recently appointed composer-in-residence, Bright Sheng, its style and movements echo Sheng's East-meets-West approach. The ballet suggests a mysterious fairy tale: as the dramatic soprano Lauren Flanigan trills menacingly, a girl tries to find her way, leaping and turning, fending off aggressors, and finally succumbing to a dark spirit (Marcovici). On Sunday afternoon, there is an all-Stravinsky program, with Wheeldon's "Scènes de Ballet" (for sixty-two students from the School of American Ballet) and three pieces by Balanchine, including the ravishing "Firebird." Casts appear on the company's Web site a week in advance. ♦ May 24 at 7:30: "Divertimento from 'Le Baiser de la Fée,'" "Liebeslieder Walzer," and "An American in Paris." ♦ May 25 at 8: "Donizetti Variations," "Two Birds with the Wings of One" (première), and "Fancy Free." ♦ May 26 at 8: "Concerto Barocco," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "The Red Violin," and "N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz." ♦ May 27 at 2: "Scènes de Ballet," "Romeo and Juliet," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," and "Fearful Symmetries." ♦ May 27 at 8: "Monumentum Pro Gesualdo," "Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "Two Birds with the Wings of One," and "Firebird." ♦ May 28 at 3 (an all-Stravinsky program): "Scènes de Ballet," "Divertimento from 'Le Baiser de la Fée,'" "Duo Concertant," and "Firebird." ♦ May 30 at 7:30: "Concerto Barocco," "Duo Concertant," "Scènes de Ballet," and "Fearful Symmetries." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Through June 25.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
The first full week of the company's spring season offers two contrasting programs. In the first, the silly, fun pirate ballet "Le Corsaire," the virtuosity (and sense of humor) of the company's dancers takes precedence over transcendence. In the second, the company offers a glimpse of the dancers' depth and acting abilities in its own Stravinsky evening—with Balanchine's "Apollo," the company première of "Jeu de Cartes," by John Cranko, and Fokine's haunting "Petrouchka." "Apollo" (1928), an essay in purity, is considered Balanchine's first neoclassical ballet; David Hallberg (who has just been promoted to principal) takes the title role for the first time this season and should capture its luminous nobility. "Petrouchka," created in 1911 for Nijinsky, artfully combines Russian folk traditions and commedia dell'arte; this week, Julia Bocca, Ángel Corella, and Sascha Radetsky will alternate in the role of the unhappy puppet. And Herman Cornejo should be especially good as the antic joker in "Jeu de Cartes," a lighthearted ballet-as-poker-game in which the dancers send up various ballet clichés. Casts are listed on the company's Web site. ♦ May 24 at 2 and 8 and May 25 at 8: "Le Corsaire." ♦ May 26 at 8: "Apollo" (with José Manuel Carreño), "Jeu de Cartes" (with Herman Cornejo), and "Petrouchka" (with Julia Bocca). ♦ May 27 at 2: "Apollo" (with David Hallberg), "Jeu de Cartes" (with corps member Craig Salstein), and "Petrouchka" (with Sascha Radetsky). ♦ May 27 at 8: "Apollo," "Jeu de Cartes," and "Petrouchka" (with Ángel Corella). ♦ May 29-30 at 8: "Apollo," "Jeu de Cartes," and "Petrouchka." (Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-362-6000. Through July 15.)

MOMIX
Having spent years defying the laws of musculature, Momix's artistic director, Moses Pendleton, takes a swing at the laws of gravity in the troupe's latest hit, "Lunar Sea." Under black lights, the glow-in-the-dark dancers appear to float, their body parts occasionally detaching and drifting off. Pendleton strikes a mood somewhere between a New Age circus, a rock-and-roll laser light show, and a psychedelic dream, keeping the crowd teetering between awe and how-did-they-do-that curiosity. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. May 23-26 at 8, May 27 at 2 and 8, and May 28 at 2 and 7:30.)

ZVIDANCE
The Israeli-born choreographer Zvi Gotheiner, a New York fixture since the eighties, offers two contrasting premières. "12A" is a purposely fractured, stop-and-start study of irrational fears and everyday superstitions that are indicated by the elevator-button title. Children's rhymes and dancer testimonials mix with small gestures of alarm and precarious movement. Where "12A" is atomized and ominous, "Les Noces" is communal and utopian. Applying Stravinsky's pagan wedding score to a post-Stonewall context, Gotheiner has his dancers pass around the roles of groom, bride, and guest, confront repression, and establish new unions. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. May 24-27 at 7:30 and May 28 at 2.)

"ADAPTATIONS: VARIATIONS ON DEBORAH HAY"
Preparing a solo by the Judson Dance Theatre pioneer Deborah Hay requires more than the usual rehearsal. The choreographer mandates a three-month process of daily meditative exercises through which each performer adapts Hay's dance. In three different programs, starting from two different solos, Lise Serrell, Scott Heron, Maryanne Chaney, Hana van der Kolk, and Layard Thompson (who organized the event) show the results of the process. (Dance New Amsterdam, 280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-279-4200. May 25-27 at 8.)

CHERYLYN LAVAGNINO
In the context of Danspace Project, Lavagnino's dedication to pointe work is unusual, as is her use of a live string quartet. For the choreographer, the departure of the evening is an experiment with improvisation and a live jazz ensemble (led by Brian Groder),

TABLES FOR TWO
MORIMOTO AND BUDDAKAN

80 Tenth Ave., between 15th and 16th Sts. (212-989-8883); 75 Ninth Ave., at 16th St. (212-989-6699)—In January, just before making his Manhattan début with these two supersized eateries, the Philadelphia restaurateur Stephen Starr boasted to the *Times* that "Morimoto will be far more interesting than any restaurant New York has ever seen." Well, maybe, if New York hasn't lately visited Megu, or En Japanese Brasserie, or even Del Posto, just across the street. It is true, though, that Starr has something special in the Teddy-bear-like Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto, more mascot than chef, who makes nightly rounds in his eponymous restaurant to scattered applause and blinding photo flashes.

How much Morimoto actually contributes to putting food on the plate is unclear, but the kitchen deserves praise. The Japanese-fusion menu has its low moments: a tuna-pizza appetizer paired oddly tasteless, almost mushy fish with an unappealing anchovy aioli. But there's a wonderfully tender ten-hour pork, set into a warm, salty congee, and a custard of briny tofu made tableside, accompanied by a delicate lobster sauce. An entrée of *ishi yaki buri bop*, yellowtail and rice cooked, with a tiny egg, inside a hot bowl, makes each plump and sticky kernel of rice pop with flavor. It's nearly enough to distract one from the cold, glittering surfaces: the wall of water bottles, the slippery, translucent chopsticks, the diners' sleek, plasticine faces.

At Buddakan, on the other hand, nothing could mitigate the unpleasantly garish atmosphere. The upstairs lounge is clogged with slick-haired men doused in cologne and young, look-alike women (black sheaths, vampish lipstick), at least some of whom are meant, however haplessly, to be hostesses. Guests descend a steep flight of steps to the dining hall, an absurd palace fantasia featuring a banquet table for thirty, where the crowd spills out from the adjoining "Golden Library," clutching brightly colored cocktails. These have ominously theological names like Sin and Sacred, and the cloying taste of Communion wine. Anyone who can finish one, much less order another, probably isn't too concerned about the food, though some of it is very good: frog legs, stir-fried with chives, are addictively nutty, and the taro-puff lollipops' flaky shells conceal a generous portion of ginger-infused pork. The rest of it—Peking duck, short ribs—is pleasant enough, and the vegetable fried rice nearly justifies its price with the addition of a sweet coconut foam. Too bad it all gets blanketed under unmodulated spice—an attempt, perhaps, to penetrate those booze-deadened taste buds. (Both restaurants open daily for dinner. Morimoto entrées $23-$44. Buddakan entrées $14-$56.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THREE ON A BOAT

A savage and cynical journalist (Leon Niemczyk), about forty, and his young, hard-bitten wife (Jolanta Umecka) pick up a reckless student (Zygmunt Malanowicz) and take him aboard their little yacht. The men get into nasty competitive games, with the woman as the prize. "Knife in the Water," Roman Polanski's first feature-length film (screening at the Pioneer Theatre on May 29), made in Poland in 1962, when the director was still in his twenties, is remorseless in its view of life and ineffably beautiful as a piece of filmmaking. Polanski has never done anything more fluent or skilled: his attention to such things as mood and gesture and the altering landscapes of wind, rain, and water is the work of a virtuoso. He stages complex movements and maneuvers in a tight, perilous space, building up erotic tension to an almost unbearable pitch. The tension is never truly released: sex is no more than a ploy in a world in which no one who is weak, or even decent, could possibly survive. You can see how postwar Poland formed Polanski, and also why he had to leave.

—*David Denby*

"Disorderly Conduct." The program also includes "Suite," in which three trios shift in and out of lovely, difficult configurations; "Bicycle Variation," a solo en pointe set to Queen's "Bicycle Race"; and "Snap Shots," which reacts to Abu Ghraib with hostile partnering and a pack of modern Wilis dancing a male to death. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. May 25-28 at 8:30.)

DANCEAFRICA 2006
Offering libations to the ancestors, Chuck Davis's celebration of all things African returns to BAM every year, the casually festive spirit of the bazaar out in the parking lot permeating the performances inside the opera house. This time around, the headliners hail from one of the lesser-known outposts of the African diaspora—Peru. Having been the primary custodian of Afro-Peruvian culture for decades, Perú Negro offers vibrant costumes and playful, percussive music and dance more reminiscent of Cuban traditions than of the Andean panpipes usually associated with the ensemble's home country. Also on the program are Creative Outlet Dance Theatre of Brooklyn, the New Jersey-based Universal African Dance & Drum Ensemble, and the local favorite, the BAM/Restoration DanceAfrica Ensemble. (30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. May 26 at 7:30, May 27 at 2 and 7:30, and May 28 at 3.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

X0 PROJECTS: "RURAL ELECTRIFICATION"
Elizabeth Brown's new chamber opera—a fantasy for female vocalist, theremin, and recorded sounds, accompanied by Lothar Osterburg's ethereal projections of images evoking Depression-era America—would seem to be a natural for the company, which operates out of a refurbished can factory near the Gowanus Canal. (Third Ave. at 3rd St., Brooklyn. May 24-27 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

AFTER DINNER OPERA: "ROMAN FEVER"
The longtime opera ensemble offers Robert Ward's neo-Romantic treatment of Edith Wharton's short story about two wealthy American widows on holiday in the Eternal City, in the relaxed setting of a Chelsea cabaret and restaurant. (Helen's Hideaway Room, 169 Eighth Ave. 212-206-0609. May 26 at 7.)

AMATO OPERA
Anthony Amato's East Village chamber-opera company ends its season with a Lilliputian production of **"Faust,"** sung with gusto by a mostly amateur cast. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. May 27 at 7:30 and May 28 at 2:30. Through June 11.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
May 24 at 6:45: In one of the orchestra's compact "Hear & Now" concerts, Steven Stucky plays host to the composer Elliott Carter, who will discuss his composition "Allegro Scorrevole" prior to a performance conducted by Ludovic Morlot. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.) ♦ May 25 at 7:30 and May 26-27 at 8: With Peter Lieberson's "The World in Flower" postponed to a future season, the Philharmonic's principal violist, Cynthia Phelps, steps into the breach to take the solo role in Berlioz's "Harold in Italy"; Lorin Maazel conducts it, along with Mahler's First Symphony. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.) ♦ May 29 at 8: The free Memorial Day concert at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine—the Philharmonic's annual gift to northern Manhattan—is conducted this year by Xian Zhang, the orchestra's able associate conductor, who will lead the group in Verdi's overture to "La Forza del Destino" and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 in E Minor. (Due to renovation work at the cathedral, seating is limited.) (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. May 29 at 8. No tickets required.)

RECITALS

"SUCCOR": PHIL KLINE
The Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria offers this new series, which next presents the world première of the downtown master's "Locus Solus: Prelude," a quasi-operatic fantasia on Raymond Roussel's pre-Surrealist 1914 novel that features the talents of the vocalist Theo Bleckmann, the violinist Todd Reynolds, and the Talujon Percussion Ensemble. (Park Ave. at 42nd St. May 24 at 8. No tickets required.)

MIDAMERICA PRODUCTIONS CHAMBER MUSIC
Two expert players from the Met Orchestra—the concertmaster, David Chan, and the principal cellist, Rafael Figueroa—team up to offer violin-and-cello duos by Ravel and Kodály and, with the exuberant young pianist Shai Wosner, Beethoven's Piano Trio in D Major, "Ghost." (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 24 at 8.)

ROBERT LEVIN: "MOZART EXPLORED"
The final program of Carnegie Hall's regular season belongs to the noted fortepianist and scholar, who accompanies Daniel Stepner in a clutch of Mozart's sonatas for the violin (including the Sonata in E Minor, K. 304), an instrument on which the composer excelled. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 25 at 7:30.)

BARGEMUSIC
May 25-26 at 7:30: The violinist Rolf Schulte, best known for his forays into the more formidable precincts of the contemporary-music scene, spends some time with the classics, offering a program of sonatas by Beethoven, Ravel (the "Sonate Posthume"), Debussy, and Brahms (the Sonata No. 1 in G Major). ♦ May 27 at 7:30 and May 28 at 4: For a special Memorial Day-weekend concert, the barge holds one of its occasional concerto concerts, featuring the violinist Mark Peskanov, the cellist Alberto Parrini, the pianist Katya Mihailova, and other musicians performing works by Haydn, Mozart ("Eine Kleine Nachtmusik"), Vivaldi, and Bach (the Concerto in D Minor for Two Violins). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

FREDERIC CHIU
The elegantly intellectual pianist completes the Metropolitan Museum's classical season with a concert that includes several works by Bach (including the Partita No. 2 in C Minor and excerpts from Book II of the Well-Tempered Clavier) along with Brahms's impassioned Sonata No. 1 in C Major, Op. 1. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. May 25 at 8.)

COMPOSERS CONCORDANCE
Percussion is prominent on the new-music collective's latest concert, an evening featuring works by William Mayer, Steve Reich ("Nagoya Marimbas"), Elliott Schwartz, and others. (Loewe Theatre, New York University, 35 W. 4th St. May 25 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

VISION-INTO-ART: "SOUNDS"
An international group of composers—Nico Muhly, Paola Prestini, and Milica Paranosic—offer their creative and political responses to Kandinsky's "Sounds," one of the first manifestations of that twentieth-century text-and-art phenomenon known as the artist's book; their collaborators include the poets Roger Bonair-Agard and Lynne Procope and the animator Marco Valentin. (Chelsea Art Museum, Eleventh Ave. at 22nd St. May 27 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

AMERICAN MODERN ENSEMBLE: "THE MUSIC OF STEVEN STUCKY"
Stucky, the winner of the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Music, has steadily risen to become a major figure in American composition, a position earned because of his music's singular combination of fastidious craftsmanship and coloristic flair. The ensemble (which features the violinist Curtis Macomber and the pianists Blair McMillen and Molly Morkoski, among others) offers a survey that includes such works as "Boston Fancies," "Ad Parnassum," and the Piano Quartet. (Tenri Cultural Institute, 43A W. 13th St. 800-838-3006. May 27-28 at 8.)

LARA TOMLIN

OUT OF TOWN

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH MUSIC: "AMADEUS!"
The cellist Yehuda Hanani's longtime Berkshires chamber series is first out of the block this summer, offering a mostly Mozart concert that will include not only the Clarinet Quintet (with Alexander Fiterstein) and a selection of songs and arias (featuring the soprano Lucy Shelton and the pianist James Tocco) but also a new work commissioned from Paul Schoenfield, a Clarinet Trio inspired by Mozart themes. (First United Methodist Church, 55 Fenn St., Pittsfield, Mass. 800-843-0778. May 27 at 6.)

MOVIES OPENING

CAVITE
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening May 26. (Cinema Village.)

AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH
A documentary about global warming, directed by Davis Guggenheim and featuring Al Gore. Opening May 24. (In wide release.)

LA MOUSTACHE
A drama, directed by Emmanuel Carrère, about a man (Vincent Lindon) who shaves his mustache but is told by family and friends that he never had one. In French. Opening May 24. (IFC Center.)

SHEM
A young man from London is sent by his grandmother to Eastern Europe to find her father's grave. Directed by Caroline Roboh. Opening May 26. (Village East Cinemas.)

STAGEDOOR
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening May 24. (Film Forum.)

X-MEN: THE LAST STAND
Brett Ratner directed this sequel, about war between mutants and humans, starring Hugh Jackman, Ian McKellen, Halle Berry, and Famke Janssen. Opening May 26. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

THE AMAZING MR. X (THE SPIRITUALIST)
This modern-gothic film noir, from 1948, is extraordinarily engrossing nonsense. A wealthy young widow (Lynn Bari), who is immured in an oceanfront mansion atop a cliff, becomes the prey of a craven psychic (Turhan Bey), who is himself lured into the web of another master manipulator, from the widow's past. The Harvard-educated director, Bernard Vorhaus, who ground out B-movies until sidelined by the blacklist, here expertly purveys the delicious mediocrity of the pulp sublime: menacing shadows, lurid close-ups, stilted dialogue, cheap ectoplasmic effects, eerie music, Freudian dreams, bloodcurdling screams—and a cynical, knowing, revelatory glimpse of the cruel machinations behind the façades of genteel society. In short, exactly the sort of idea that could get a guy blacklisted.—*Richard Brody* (Museum of Modern Art; May 27.)

ARMY OF SHADOWS
The tightest thriller in town. Jean-Pierre Melville is widely worshipped for his gangster sagas, such as "Le Samouraï" and "Le Cercle Rouge," but this tale of the French Resistance, though no less stylish (hats and dark suits still abound), has an added pulse of the heartfelt. It stars Lino Ventura as a stalwart of the underground movement, who slips the shackles of the occupying Germans and rejoins his small band of fellow-heroes. Not that their heroism is remotely flamboyant; what concerns Melville is the courage of the stoical, the phlegmatic, and the formidably organized. His direction honors that efficiency with a series of set pieces (one in a barber shop, another at Gestapo headquarters, a third in the face of a firing squad) in which the suspense grows almost intolerable. The movie, though made in 1969, has never been released here before. To miss it now would be a gross dereliction of duty. With an unflappable Simone Signoret. In French.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 5/8/06.) (Film Forum; through May 30.)

ART SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL
The director Terry Zwigoff's second collaboration with the graphic novelist Daniel Clowes (the first was the brilliant "Ghost World") follows a hapless art-school student, Jerome (Max Minghella), who refuses to give up his dream of being the greatest artist in the world. Zwigoff ensconces his youthful idealist in relentless satirical commentary on the stereotypes and (often hilarious) pomposities of art school. However, the simplistic dual plots—one involving Jerome's obsession with the prettiest girl on campus (Sophia Myles), the other having to do with a strangler on the loose—feel artificially applied, and make for a disjointed second half. Not even John Malkovich, as a drawing teacher who has discovered triangles after twenty-five years of struggle, can save this ultimately dull enterprise.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

CAVITE
This taut and clever thriller, dressed down as low-budget social realism, is co-directed with impressive pluck and craft by Neill Dela Llana and Ian Gamazon. Adam (Gamazon), a young Filipino-American working as a night watchman in San Diego, learns that his mother and sister have been kidnapped in the Philippines and that he must go there to ransom them personally. Once there, he is in the grips of their captors, from the violent Muslim group Abu Sayyaf, who watch his every move and teleguide him with a harrowing stream of cell-phone orders and Machiavellian mind games. Dela Llana's handheld videography in the streets and back alleys of Manila and Cavite City has (despite some superfluous effects) a documentary authenticity—as if it were done with a hidden camera—and the descent into unfamiliar and dangerous ground ratchets up the tension with a horrifying precision. The politics, however, are entirely beside the point. In English, Filipino, and Tagalog.—*R.B.* (Cinema Village.)

THE DA VINCI CODE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

GIULIANI TIME
By September 10, 2001, Rudolph Giuliani seemed to have worn out his welcome as Mayor of New York, but the sorrier aspects of his two terms of office were all but wiped from collective memory by his aplomb amidst the chaos of 9/11. Kevin Keating's documentary is a bracing reminder of Giuliani's rule and a debunking of his reputation. Though sustained by the recurring onscreen presence of the journalist Wayne Barrett, its first hour of scattershot criticisms from such motivated rivals as David Dinkins and Ron Kuby plays like attack-ad overkill. But then the facts kick in. The increased police brutality, exacerbated racial tensions, disregard for civil liberties, callous indifference to suffering, the martyrdom of Amadou Diallo and Abner Louima—all are recalled in a seething assemblage of interviews and news clips that induce painful flashbacks. Unfortunately, Keating's technique is not up to his ambitions: as in campaign advertising, even the truth is often obscured by the hard-sell package.—*R.B.* (Sunshine Cinema.)

THE KING
Elvis (Gael García Bernal), a clean-cut young man, emerges from the Navy and looks up his father, David (William Hurt), a prominent preacher in Corpus Christi, Texas. David, married with a family, has never acknowledged Elvis, whose mother was a prostitute. When he spurns the boy again, Elvis seduces David's teen-age daughter (Pell James) and menaces the rest of the family. The director, James Marsh, works in a quietly contemplative

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style that is meant to be lulling, but it backfires: Elvis's pathological acts arrive out of nowhere, and you can't believe any of them. Bernal, however, is creepily effective: his smile could seduce anyone. The movie seems to be an attack on the certainties of Evangelical Christianity; among other things, it offers a vicious practical refutation of the theory of intelligent design.—*David Denby* (Sunshine Cinema.)

LADY VENGEANCE

The third installment of the Korean director Park Chanwook's revenge trilogy may not be as graphically violent as its predecessors, but there are still buckets of blood and a curious lack of any emotional involvement besides disgust. The film's fragmented story line tells the tale of a woman who, to protect her daughter from a killer, deliberately spends years in prison for a murder she didn't commit. When she's released, she calls in favors from her former fellow-inmates to track down the real murderer. As a director, Park has a pulpy enough imagination, and his striking compositions and woozy camerawork are always visually commanding, but the film's enervated, single-minded quest for revenge leaves the viewer with nothing more to reflect on than cold moral ambiguity. In Korean.—*Bruce Diones* (Sunshine Cinema.)

THE MARK OF ZORRO

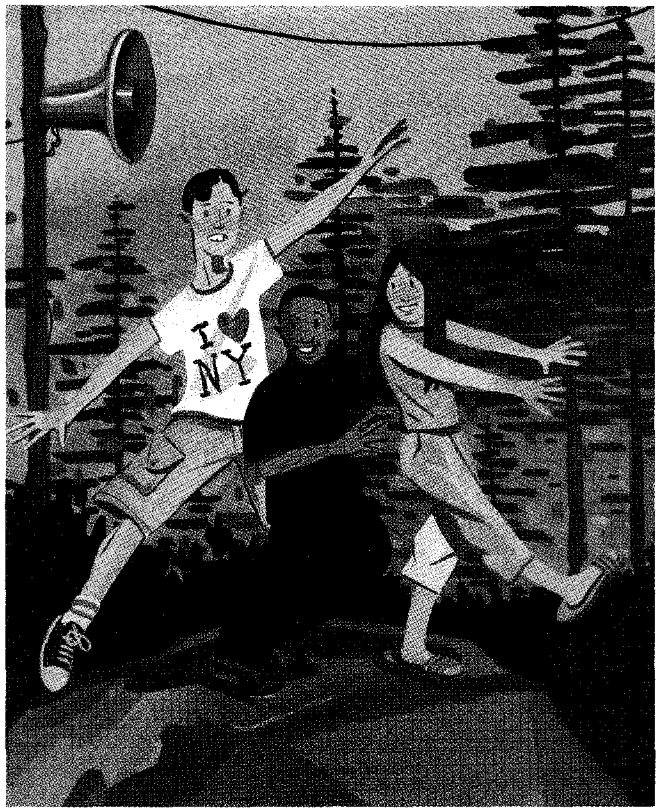
Douglas Fairbanks's first great acrobatic adventure, from 1920, set the standard for zesty swashbucklers. As Spanish California's masked avenger, with a foppish cover identity and a propensity for swooping down on his enemies out of nowhere, Zorro is Robin Hood, the Scarlet Pimpernel, and Batman rolled into one. Fairbanks didn't need a molded bodysuit or special effects to give the audience a charge: he did it with comic showmanship and physical exuberance. In Zorro's bouts with the evil governor and his minions, Fairbanks accents the play in swordplay and never merely runs when he can gambol; he leads the bad guys on a merry chase. And, if he's extravagantly cunning as Zorro, he's furtively cunning as the dandified Don Diego, especially when he acts the fool by courting the beautiful Lolita (Marguerite de la Motte) with parlor tricks. Directed by Fred Niblo. Silent.—*Michael Sragow* (Museum of Modern Art; May 25.)

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE III

Tom Cruise returns as Ethan Hunt, the superfit secret operative who needs a team of fellow-agents to help him retrieve his missing sense of humor. They must also track down Agent Lindsey Farris (Keri Russell) in Berlin. She has been captured by Owen Davian (Philip Seymour Hoffman), who represents an even greater threat to world stability than Truman Capote. This third installment of the franchise, directed by J. J. Abrams, is the most streamlined to date, with a succession of gargantuan set pieces (the best of them in the Vatican) and dogged attempts to perforate the eardrums of the audience. Little of it makes sense, and the treachery of insiders—a source of worry to Hunt's superiors, played by Laurence Fishburne and Billy Crudup—has become the most wearisome feature of the genre. Toward the end, Abrams seems to run out of juice, and the role of Hunt's new wife (Michelle Monaghan) feels insultingly plaintive and thin. A tip for the next sequel: the closer these movies get to the old TV series, with its indefatigable teamwork, the more gripping they become. The mission was never meant to be a one-man show. With the imperturbable Ving Rhames.—*A.L.* (5/15/06) (In wide release.)

THE MUSIC OF REGRET

Laurie Simmons, an artist known for her photographs of ventriloquists' dummies and household objects with legs, combines her prior work into a forty-minute musical for which she wrote the words and Michael Rohatyn composed the music. The first part puts two families of puppets at odds over a job promotion; the second features Meryl Streep in romantic duets with a dummy (who is voiced by Adam Guettel); the third shows the legged objects, embodied by the Alvin Ailey 2 company, taking the stage to audition for their roles. With no movie technique (but a great cameraman, Ed Lachman), Simmons has assembled her interests as if in a toy chest: old movies and TV commercials, Broadway songs, good-to-feel-bad bathos, and the effluvia of domestic life. Whether intentionally or not, Simmons has made a film about the inevitable post-Warhol art-world nexus of irony, finance, and glamour, a luxury object of empty intentions that the viewer fills with his own need for art, just as the second act's real-world woman endows a dummy with her romantic hopes and dreams.—*R.B.* (Museum of Modern Art; May 24 and May 29.)



"Stagedoor," a documentary about teen actors, opens May 24.

POSEIDON

In his remake of the campy "Poseidon Adventure," the director Wolfgang Petersen, back in the water again, gets down to business quickly: a giant cruise liner gets hit by a rogue wave and turns turtle. The ship's poker-table hustler (Josh Lucas), who mysteriously possesses the precise skills required to lead people through upside-down ocean liners, takes command of a few would-be survivors. What follows is an exciting exercise in fear and hydraulics. No doubt about it: Petersen has a dynamic feel for the rush and heave of water, the pent-up energy, the sheer heft and uncontrollable momentum of the stuff. Mashed, whomped in the face with exploding hatches, bloodied, burned, forcibly gargled again and again, the actors give a good impression of going through hell, and they look genuinely worse for the wear. With Kurt Russell, Emmy Rossum, and Richard Dreyfuss. Cinematography by John Seale.—*D.D.* (5/22/06) (In wide release.)

THE PROMISE

Lilac-pretty digital rubbish about warriors and princesses, all swirling around in what looks like a gigantic Chinese video game. Grandiose (allegedly the most expensive movie ever made in China) and flagrantly stylized in a way that is of no interest. Avoid. Directed by Chen Kaige. In Mandarin.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

THE PROPOSITION

John Hillcoat's sweat-stained movie is set in the Australian outback at the tail end of the nineteenth century. Here, outside a remote settlement, live Captain Morris Stanley (Ray Winstone), the chief of police, and his wife, Martha (Emily Watson), who are striving to maintain a British decorum, complete with Christmas dinner, in an untamable land. Hence the determination with which Stanley pursues the Burns gang—three brothers (Richard Wilson, Guy Pearce, and Danny Huston) who have murdered a local family. The title refers to Stanley's risky offer: if the middle brother can find and kill the eldest and most savage, the youngest will be spared. What ensues is a strange blend of manhunt and tone poem, in which even the most brutal characters seem rapt in the face of red earth and endless sky. The film was written by Nick Cave, who, not surprisingly, supplied the music; the result may feel confused as a narrative, but, as a portrait of a riven culture, bred on racial conflict, it is formidably hard to ignore.—*A.L.* (5/8/06) (Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.)

RUSSIAN DOLLS

Romain Duris plays Xavier, a thirtyish cipher, who, along with Wendy (Kelly Reilly), was among the seven characters in "L'Auberge Espagnole" (2002), a friendly, lightweight comedy about a group of young people from all over Europe spending a year together as roommates in a Barcelona flat. At the end of the movie, Xavier goes back to Paris, where, a few years later, his life has become a pointless mess. A hack journalist and screenwriter, he doesn't seem to know what he wants to write, or who he is, or which woman he wants to make love to. He teams up with Wendy in London on a screenplay but can't give up a beautiful model with pouty lips (Lucy Gordon). The movie offers touristic views of Paris and St. Petersburg and many pretty faces and bodies; it's pleasant and fast-moving, but you may want to brain the slightly vacuous hero for not recognizing that the extraordinary woman right in front of him is the only woman in the world. Written and directed by Cédric Klapisch. With Audrey Tautou. In English, Russian, French, Spanish, and Italian.—*D.D.* (5/22/06) (IFC Center.)

STAGEDOOR

A charming documentary about Stagedoor Manor, the well-known teen theatre camp in the Catskills. The director, Alexandra Shiva, focusses on five campers, including Robert, a humble young singer-dancer and a veteran Broadway performer who played Simba in "The Lion King"; Maddy, a less talented but no less passionate wallflower; and Nicole, a self-proclaimed misfit who just wants to make people laugh, and does. Shiva cuts back and forth between the kids' riveting interviews with their dramatic (in every sense) counselors and scenes of their classes, rehearsals, and performances, but she goes only so far in illuminating the campers' inner experiences.—*S.L.* (Film Forum.)

UNITED 93

Paul Greengrass's account of how a single group of passengers, almost certain of death, decided on the morning of September 11, 2001, to fight back against hijackers on a suicide mission turns out to be—after much public anxiety about potential "exploitation"—an example of a hundred per cent professional filmmaking. Greengrass's movie is tightly wrapped, unrelenting, and, no matter how exciting, superbly precise. For this story of semi-anonymous group heroism, he uses actual professionals (pilots, flight attendants, an air-traffic controller) mixed in with largely unknown actors, and avoids visual or verbal rhetoric. The handheld camera is an active participant in everything that's going on—and still manages to see what it needs to see out of the corner of its eye. The avoidance of front-and-center staging makes us feel the uncertainty of an unprecedented situation. This is true existential filmmaking; in the end, the view-

ZOHAR LAZAR

er's dread is released in mad exhilaration as the passengers charge the hijackers with the force of engorged water breaking through a dam.—*D.D.* (5/1/06) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

AN AMERICAN HAUNTING: In wide release. **GOAL! THE DREAM BEGINS:** In wide release. **OVER THE HEDGE:** In wide release. **STICK IT:** In wide release. **THE WILD:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Films from the collection of Richard Schwarz. May 25 at 7 and May 27 at 6:30: "Le Départ" (1967, Jerzy Skolimowski; in French). ♦ May 25 at 9 and May 27 at 8:30: "Les Enfants Terribles" (1950, Jean-Pierre Melville; in French). ♦ May 26 at 7 and May 28 at 4: "Carnival in Flanders" (1935, Jacques Feyder; in French). ♦ May 26 at 9:30 and May 28 at 6:30: "Circle of Danger" (1951, Jacques Tourneur). ♦ May 27 at 4 and May 28 at 8:30: "Millions Like Us" (1943, Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat). ♦ Special screenings. May 25 at 8: "The Cripples Go Christmas" (1987, Ralf Huettner; in German). ♦ May 26 and May 29-30 at 7 and 9 and May 27-28 at 5, 7, and 9: "Blast of Silence" (1961, Allen Baron). ♦ May 30 at 7: "Man of Paper" (1954, Ismael Rodríguez; in Spanish, no subtitles).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Cinema Tropical." May 24 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Suite Habana" (2003, Fernando Pérez; in Spanish). ♦ "Dance Africa 2006." May 25 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Clando" (1996, Jean-Marie Téno; in French). ♦ May 26 at 2 and 6:50: "The Colonial Misunderstanding" (2004, Téno; in French). ♦ May 26 at 4:30 and 9:15: "A Trip to the Country" (2000, Téno; in French) and "Alex's Wedding" (2003, Téno; in French). ♦ May 27 at 2 and 4:30 and May 29 at 2: "The Golden Ball" (1992, Cheik Doukouré; in French). ♦ May 27 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Niiwam" (1991, Clarence Thomas Delgado; in Wolof and French). ♦ May 28 at 2 and 4:30: "Dôlé" (1999, Imunga Ivanga; in French). ♦ May 28 at 6:50 and 9:15: Short-film program. ♦ May 29-30 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Delwende" (2005, S. Pierre Yameogo; in Mòoré and French).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. May 24-30 at 1, 3:45, 6:45, and 9:30: "Army of Shadows" (†). ♦ Through June 15: "B Noir." May 24 at 1:10, 4:40, and 8:10: "Pushover" (1954, Richard Quine). ♦ May 24 at 3, 6:30, and 10: "Woman on the Run" (1950, Norman Foster). ♦ May 25 at 1:10, 4:40, and 8:10: "Between Midnight and Dawn" (1950, Gordon Douglas). ♦ May 25 at 3, 6:30, and 10: "Trapped" (1949, Richard Fleischer). ♦ May 26-27 at 1:10, 4:45, and 8:20: "Phantom Lady" (1944, Robert Siodmak). ♦ May 26-27 at 6, 6:35, and 10:10: "The Suspect" (1944, Siodmak). ♦ May 28 at 1, 5:10, and 9:15 and May 29 at 1: "Armored Car Robbery" (1950, Fleischer). ♦ May 28 at 2:30, 6:40, and 10:35 and May 29 at 2:30: "Follow Me Quietly" (1949, Fleischer). ♦ May 28 at 3:50 and 8 and May 29 at 3:50: "The Clay Pigeon" (1949, Fleischer). ♦ May 29 at 5:10 and 8:40: "Raw Deal" (1948, Anthony Mann). ♦ May 29 at 6:50 and 10:20: "T-Men" (1947, Mann). ♦ May 30 at 1, 4:20, and 7:40: "He Walked by Night" (1948, Alfred L. Werker and Mann). ♦ May 30 at 2:40, 6, and 9:20: "Canon City" (1948, Crane Wilbur).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—The films of André Téchiné. May 23 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "Strayed" (2003; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—The Films of Akira Kurosawa. May 26-29 at noon: "The Seven Samurai" (1954; in Japanese). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." May 26-28: "Shaft" (1971, Gordon Parks).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Through June 21: "To Save and Project." May 24 at 6:30: "Asphalt" (1929, Joe May; silent). ♦ May 24 at 8:15: "People on Sunday" (1929, Robert Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer, and Fred Zinnemann; silent) and "Ideale Filmerzeugung" (1913, Ludwig Schaschek; silent). ♦ May 25 at 6: "The Mark of Zorro" (†). ♦ May 25 at 8:15: "The Mark of Zorro" (1940, Rouben Mamoulian) and "Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp" (1939, Dave Fleischer). ♦ May 26 at 8:30 and May 28 at 5:30: "The Cross of Love" (1946, Teuvo Tulio; in Finnish). ♦ May 27 at 3: "The Amazing Mr. X (The Spiritualist)" (†). ♦ May 27 at 6:30: "The Family Honor" (1920, King Vidor; silent) and "When It Rains, It Pours!" (1916, William Wolbert; silent). ♦ May 28 at 1: "Lost Youth" (1948, Pietro Germi; in Italian). ♦ May 28 at 3: "The Scientific Cardplayer" (1972, Luigi Comencini; in Italian). ♦ May 29 at 1:30: "In the Fields of Dreams" (1940, Tulio; in Finnish). ♦ May 29 at 3:45: "The Way You Wanted Me" (1944, Tulio; in Finnish). ♦ May 29 at 6: "The Song of the Scarlet Flower" (1938, Tulio; in Finnish). ♦ Special screenings. May 24 at 7 and 8:15 and May 29 at 1: "The Music of Regret" (†). ♦ Films from CalArts. For more information, go to www.moma.org. May 25 at 7: Short films, including "Wormholes" (1993, Stephen Hillenburg). ♦ May 26 at 6:30: Short films, including "An Injury to One" (2002, Travis Wilkerson). ♦ May 26 at 8:30: Short films, including "Leche" (1999, Naomi Uman). ♦ May 27 at 2 and May 29 at 3:30: "The 1970s," part one. ♦ May 27 at 3:30 and May 29 at 2: "The 1970s," part two. ♦ May 27 at 6: Two documentaries by Hyun Kyung Kim. ♦ May 27 at 8:30 and May 28 at 1: "O Scene of Unexampled Woe," a short-film program. ♦ May 28 at 3 and May 29 at 5:30: "You Are There," a short-film program. ♦ May 28 at 5: "Down These Mean Streets," a short-film program.

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Independence World Cinema Showcase." May 26 at 7:30: "Battle in Heaven" (2004, Carlos Reygadas; in Spanish). ♦ Through June 8: "American Maverick: A Robert Altman Retrospective." May 27 at 1:30: "Gosford Park" (2001). ♦ May 27-28 at 4: "H.E.A.L.T.H." (1980). ♦ May 27-28 at 6:30: "Short Cuts" (1993). ♦ May 28 at 2: "Tanner on Tanner" (2004).

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—Special screenings. May 24 at 7: "Forgiving Dr. Mengele" (2006, Bob Hercules and Cheri Pugh). ♦ May 24 at 9: "Independent Intervention" (2006, Tonje Hessen Schei). ♦ May 25 at 7: "Life of an Agent" (2004, Gabor Zsigmond Papp; in Hungarian). ♦ May 25-30 at 9: "What Is a Man Without a Moustache?" (2005, Hrvoje Hribar; in Croatian). ♦ May 26 at 7: "The Whole Town's Talking" (1935, John Ford). ♦ May 26 at 11:30: "24 Hours on Craigslist" (2005, Michael Ferris Gibson). ♦ May 27 at 6:30: Fusion Arts Museum short films, program one. ♦ May 27 at 11:30: "The Evil Dead" (1981, Sam Raimi). ♦ May 28 at 6:30: Fusion Arts Museum short films, program two. ♦ May 29 at 7: "Knife in the Water" (1962, Roman Polanski; in Polish). ♦ May 30 at 6:30: "Keane" (2004, Lodge Kerrigan).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." May 26-28: "The Goonies" (1985, Richard Donner).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—In revival. May 28 at 2 and May 30 at 3:30: "Sophie Scholl: The Final Days" (2005, Marc Rothemund; in German). ♦ May 28 at 4:30 and May 30 at 6: "My Name Is Ivan" (1962, Andrei Tarkovsky; in Russian).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—The Films of Elem Klimov and Larisa Shepitko. All films are

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in Russian. May 24 at 2:15 and 6:45, May 27 at 4, and May 28 at 6:15: "You and I" (1971, Shepitko). ♦ May 24 at 4:15 and 8:45, May 26 at 6:15, and May 28 at 2: "Farewell to Matyora" (1981, Klimov). ♦ May 26 at 4 and 8:45 and May 29 at 3:45 and 8:45: "The Ascent" (1978, Shepitko). ♦ May 27 at 1 and 6, May 28 at 8:15, and May 30 at 3: "Agony (Rasputin)" (1981, Klimov). ♦ May 27 at 9 and May 28 at 4:30: "The Adventures of a Dentist" (1965, Klimov). ♦ May 29 at 1 and 6: "Come and See" (1978, Klimov). ♦ Special screenings. May 25 at 8: "Pine Flat" (2006, Sharon Lockhart). ♦ May 30 at 6:30: "Easter Parade" (1948, Charles Walters) and short films, presented by David Leopold.

READINGS AND TALKS

"WORD FOR WORD"
The alfresco lunchtime series in Bryant Park continues with Augusten Burroughs, who will read from his new book, "Possible Side Effects: True Stories." (Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. For more information, call 212-803-5890. May 24 at 12:30.)

HOWELL RAINES
The journalist and fly fisherman discusses his new memoir, "The One That Got Away." (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 66th St. No tickets necessary. May 24 at 7.)

"SELECTED SHORTS"
The long-running series in which actors read short fiction presents slightly different fare this week. "Extra, Extra: Stories About the News: An Evening with the Moth," features the musician Moby, the television-news correspondent Randall Pinkston, the television-news producer Janet Paist, the writer Tom Reiss, and others telling unscripted tales about the media. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. May 24 at 8.)

92ND STREET Y
The sex-advice columnist Dan Savage, the blogger Andrew Sullivan, and the writer Erica Jong talk about love, sex, politics, and relationships. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. May 30 at 8:15.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"LITERARY UPSTART"
The L Magazine's "American Idol"-like short-story-reading competition, in which aspiring writers are judged by a panel of literary-world insiders, is back for its second season. The participants will read their fiction in front of Ben Greenman, an editor at this magazine, Brettne Bloom, a literary agent, Margaux Wexberg-Sanchez, a book editor, and others as they chase big bucks and fame, or at least a little cash and publication in *The L Magazine's* forthcoming fiction issue. The contest started in April and continues monthly until the finale, on July 21. (The Baggot Inn, 82 W. 3rd St. May 25 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

LOWER EAST SIDE FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS
Hundreds of downtown performers—from puppeteers and poets to actors and acrobats—converge on the Theatre for the New City for three days of free music, art, dance, and more. (155 First Ave., at 10th St. No tickets necessary. May 26-28. For a complete schedule, visit www.theaterforthenewcity.net.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Things heat up again with big sales of American and Latin-American art around town. In its two-day sale of Latin-American paintings (May 24-25), **Sotheby's** offers "Roots," a rare full-length self-portrait by Frida Kahlo. The painting, which was seen last year at the Tate Modern, dates from 1943; Kahlo lies on the ground in a vibrantly colored traditional dress, as vines emerge from her heart and take root in the rocky soil. The auction also includes works by several Mexican Surrealist women artists, including Remedios Varo and Leonora Carrington, as well as such international figures as Fernando Botero, Francisco Zúñiga, and Matta. In the house's offering of American paintings (May 24), we find works by Sargent, Hassam, and Rockwell—a touching image of a soldier back from the war, recounting his experiences to a rapt circle of friends in a garage. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Christie's** two-day sale of Latin-American art (May 23-24) is headlined by an untitled gouache from 1944 by Wifredo Lam, depicting an enigmatic woman clutching a knife, in a Cubist style with African references; the auction also features works by Tamayo, Portinari, and the ubiquitous Botero. Among the works in an auction of American art (May 25), Maxfield Parrish's "Daybreak" is perhaps the most recognizable; the dreamy, pre-Raphaelite-inspired landscape was painted in 1922 for the purpose of reproduction as a lithograph, which was sold in huge numbers. Also in the sale are pieces from the collection of the late McDonald's heiress Joan B. Kroc, including works by Frieseke, Rockwell, and Chase. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ On May 25, **Swann** hosts a sale of books from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including children's books, detective fiction, and literary classics. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

"Eraritjaritjaka," at the Lincoln Center Festival.

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

ON THE HORIZON

ART
"DADA," AT MOMA
June 18–Sept. 11

This survey of the early years of the Dada movement is travelling to New York from the National Gallery, in Washington. See works by Man Ray, Hannah Höch, Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters, and dozens of other icons of anarchic art-making. (212-708-9400.)

MOVIES
THE STAR SYSTEM
June 19–Aug. 21

Is there a film better suited for outdoor viewing than "The Birds"? Alfred Hitchcock's nature nightmare opens the HBO Bryant Park film series, which continues with Howard Hawks's "To Have and Have Not," Robert Altman's "M*A*S*H," and "The Band Wagon," in which Vincente Minnelli puts Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse through the paces of the "Girl Hunt Ballet." (212-768-4242.)

THE THEATRE
REVOLUTION ROAD
June 20

The Public Theatre and Labyrinth Theatre Company present the world première of "School of the Americas," a new drama by José Rivera, the Oscar-nominated screenwriter of "The Motorcycle Diaries." The play follows Che Guevara as he is captured and held prisoner in a one-room schoolhouse in Bolivia. (212-239-6200.)

NIGHT LIFE
BIG-BAND POWER
June 22 and June 24–25

Bruce Springsteen's new album, "We Shall Overcome," is a tribute to Pete Seeger that Springsteen recorded with more than a dozen backing musicians. The Boss and his company are now out on tour, with a stop at Madison Square Garden and two nights at the PNC Amphitheatre, in Holmdel, New Jersey. (212-307-7171.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
WRIT LARGE
July 27–29

Heiner Goebbels, a composer-director who creates evanescent yet deeply affecting music-theatre works based on existing sources, returns to the Lincoln Center Festival with "Eraritjaritjaka," a new multimedia piece based on the writings of Elias Canetti. (212-721-6500.)

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Vice President of Information Services,
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Retail Trailblazing

An adventurous spirit extends to technology innovation.

On a typical weekend afternoon at the Seattle flagship store of Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI), a customer is climbing the wall. Not just any wall, but the 65-foot Pinnacle—one of the tallest indoor climbing structures in the world. Elsewhere, customers are putting shoes through the paces on the store’s footwear test trail. Or test-riding bicycles on the store’s outdoor bike path.

Adventure hangs in the air at REI’s 82 retail locations. Indeed, an adventurous spirit is at the core of REI, a consumer cooperative founded in 1938 by 23 Pacific Northwest mountaineers.

The bold spirit extends to technology, too. REI was one of the first national retailers to roll out wireless networks to all its stores some four years ago. In-store kiosks link customers to REI.com, where they can get detailed product information, create and print product-comparison charts, and order any item from the retailer’s massive inventory. Wireless barcode scanners allow customers to automatically create their own gift registries while roaming the aisles.

REI depends on an end-to-end Intelligent Retail Network solution from Cisco Systems for its wireless networks, e-commerce, retail automation and more. “The network helps REI convey a sense of adventure to our customers,” notes Brad Brown, Vice President of Information Services. In turn, that adventurous spirit helps REI maintain its fiercely loyal customer base—which is essential to the member-owned cooperative.

And that’s just the beginning. Currently, REI is exploring the use of wireless devices to shorten check-out lines; interacting with customers in-store via cell phone; and reducing costs with a widespread deployment of IP Communications. Supported by a secure, reliable network infrastructure from Cisco, REI will continue to blaze new trails in retailing.

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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
THE LETTER

The epistle that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the more or less duly elected President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, sent George W. Bush, the more or less duly elected President of the United States of America, a couple of weeks ago has achieved a certain fame. Like "Remembrance of Things Past" or the tax code, it's long, and, partly for that reason, more talked about than read. The newspapers refer to it as "the 18-page letter," although, to be fair, it occupies only six pages in the original Farsi. The text, in an Iranian-provided English translation, is widely available on the Internet. Still, in all probability not everyone has had the chance, or the inclination, to read it. Life is short, and the letter isn't.

The tone is at once polite—not a word about infidels or the Great Satan—and arrogant, with a weird overlay of crackpot earnestness. The reader often feels trapped in a college bull session with a student who, while not overly bright, has plenty of self-esteem. (Ahmadinejad's formative years were his student ones, when he was caught up in, and may have participated in, the 1979 seizure of the American Embassy and hostages.) The air of undergraduate languor is made explicit in the letter's first sentence:

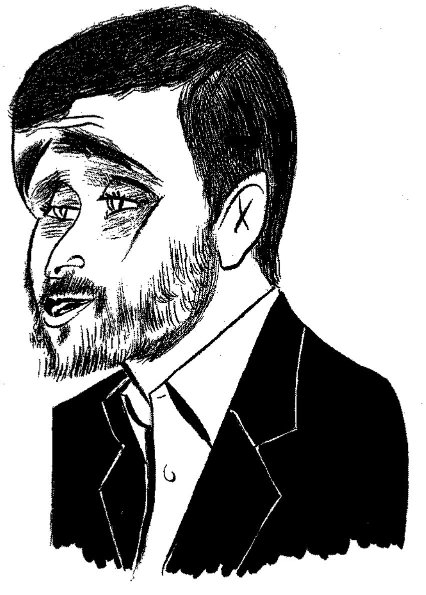
> For some time now, I have been thinking, how one can justify the undeniable contradictions that exist in the international arena—which are being constantly debated, especially in political forums and amongst university students.

Much of the text is given over to faux-naïve rhetorical questions, some of them superficially reasonable—

> Don't Latin Americans have the right to ask why their elected governments are being opposed and coup leaders supported?

> Can the possibility of scientific achievements being utilized for military purposes be reason enough to oppose science and technology altogether?

> Are you pleased with the current condition of the world?



—and others anything but, and sinister to boot:

> After the war they claimed that six million Jews had been killed. Six million people that were surely related to at least two million families. Again let us assume that these events are true. Does that logically translate into the establishment of the state of Israel in the Middle East or support for such a state?

> September eleven was not a simple operation. Could it be planned and executed without coordination with intelligence and security services—or their extensive infiltration?

"Of course this is just an educated guess," Ahmadinejad adds casually after this last hair-raiser, as if with a shrug and a smile. Most likely, he wrote this letter by himself, or by himself with the help of underlings too terrified to tell him how weird and scary he was sounding. It was certainly not drafted by the Iranian foreign ministry, which still has professionals on its staff.

The reaction to the 18-pager on the part of the Bush Administration and its political allies has ranged from gleeful to dismissive. Start with the allies and the glee. John "War on Christmas" Gibson, of Fox News, offered this summary:

> WMD lies, says the Iranian president. Democrat talking point. Human-rights abuses in Gitmo. Another Dem talking point. The gap between haves and have-nots. The Iranian president and the Dems in lockstep on that one, too. The biggest difference? Ahmadinejad was actually nice about Jesus and Christians.

"It's the Democratic talking points," Rush Limbaugh agreed on his radio show, adding, by way of rounding up a few more of

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

the usual suspects, "It's even some liberal Hollywood Jewish people talking point." Maybe, but Ahmadinejad tosses in a few conservative Crawford Christian people talking points, too: toppling Saddam Hussein is something "the people of the region are happy about"; "liberalism" is no good; ditto "certain Western media."

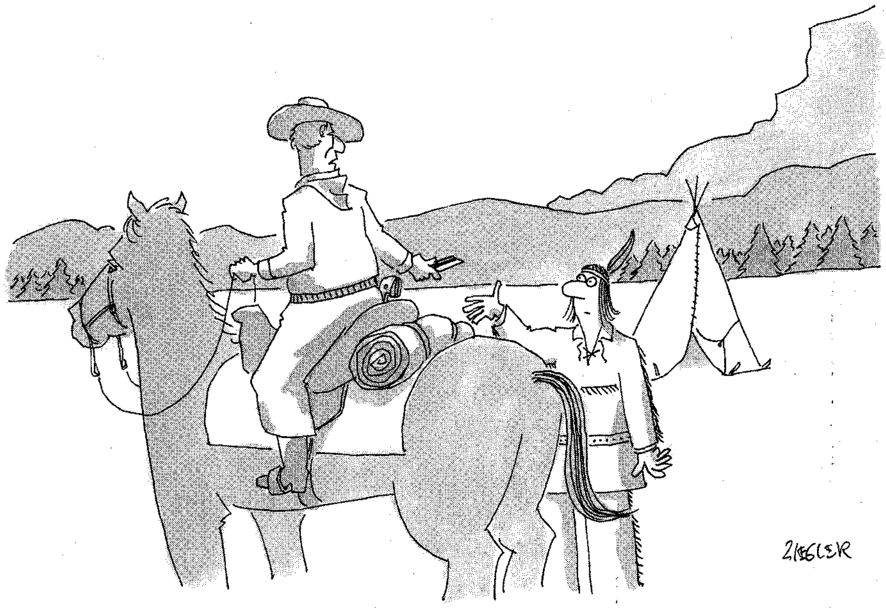
The official Bush Administration response was curt. "Dismissed" was the word used in every paper's lead. "This letter isn't it," the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, said. "The letter appears to be more about changing the subject," the White House press secretary chimed in. And President Bush himself told a group of Florida reporters, "It looks like it did not answer the main question that the world is asking, and that is, 'When will you get rid of your nuclear program?' "

In other words, stamp that letter "Return to Sender." As these responses correctly suggest, the immediate context for Ahmadinejad's letter is Iran's pursuit of the kind of nuclear technology that could enable it, at some point, to build a bomb. Iran's "program," unlike Iraq's under Saddam, exists, and it is extremely dangerous. No one really knows what to do about it. Thanks in part (but only in part) to the Iraq fiasco, going to war, in the air or on the ground, is a very, very bad idea. That leaves diplomacy, backed by the threat of sanctions. The Administration's dismissal of Ahmadinejad's letter is of a piece with its broader approach, which is a refusal to negotiate, or in any way to engage, directly with Iran and its opaque government. The bankruptcy of this approach grows daily more apparent. Those who have lately called for changing it include not only Democrats like former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright but also Republicans like Richard Armitage, a former deputy Secretary of State; Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations; and Senator Chuck Hagel, of Nebraska.

As Henry Kissinger—another ex-Secretary of State, and another Republican supporter of engagement with Iran—noted last week in the Washington *Post*, the letter is not without significance, since it is "the first direct approach by an Iranian leader to a U.S. President in more than twenty-five years." As for the letter itself, though, Kissinger said that the "demagogic tone" of it "merited its rejection." How unimaginative. Isn't the letter's demagoguery precisely what requires (even if it doesn't "merit") a response? It's true that the letter offered no specific openings on the nuclear issue. But there is such a thing as public diplomacy. Ahmadinejad's letter was an example—and, both despite and because of its lunacy, a pretty effective one. The struggle against Islamist extremism, the Administration often reminds us, is, among other things, a battle of ideas.

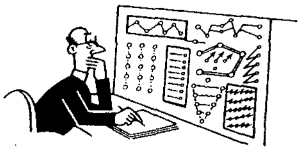
One can imagine a letter from an American President. It would go beyond nuclear warnings to ask a few questions of its own—questions about the Iranian regime's suppression of freedom of expression, routine use of torture, domination by unelected clerics, and persecution of ethnic and religious minorities. It would refute, in detail, Ahmadinejad's ugly fantasies about the Holocaust and 9/11, which are common currency among parts of the Muslim public. Much of Ahmadinejad's letter is devoted to religious hectoring, culminating in an appeal to Bush's faith. The Iranian President writes that he has "been told that Your Excellency follows the teachings of Jesus (Peace Be Upon Him) and believes in the divine promise of the rule of the righteous on Earth." One can imagine an American President responding that he believes in the rule of the people, righteous and unrighteous alike, exercised through democratic institutions. It's a little harder to imagine that response from this particular American President. But one can dream.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*



"We'll be paying for the prairie, the forests, and the streams with this credit card, which is just as good as—if not better than—trinkets."

NATIONAL SECURITY DEPT.
LISTENING IN



A few days before the start of the confirmation hearings for General Michael Hayden, who has been nominated by President Bush to be the head of the C.I.A., I spoke to an official of the National Security Agency who recently retired. The official joined the N.S.A. in the mid-nineteen-seventies, soon after contentious congressional hearings that redefined the relationship between national security and the public's right to privacy. The hearings, which revealed that, among other abuses, the N.S.A. had illegally intercepted telegrams to and from the United States, led to the passage of the 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, or FISA, to protect citizens from unlawful surveillance. "When I first came in, I heard from all my elders that 'we'll never be able to collect intelligence again,'" the former official said. "They'd whine, 'Why do we have to report to oversight committees?' " But, over the next few years, he told me, the agency did find a way to operate within the law. "We built a system that protected national security and left people able to go home at night without worrying whether what they did that day was appropriate or legal."

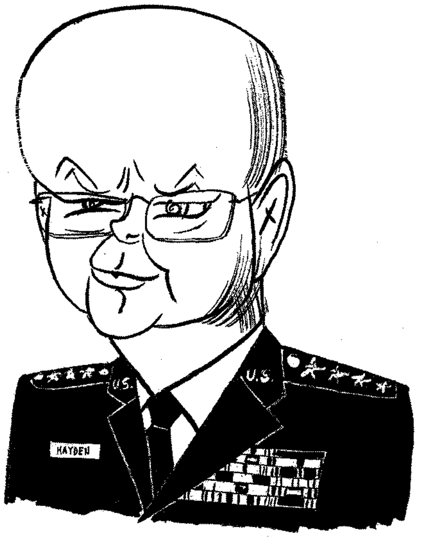
After the attacks of September 11, 2001, it was clear that the intelligence community needed to get more aggressive and improve its performance. The Administration, deciding on a quick fix, returned to the tactic that got intelligence agencies in trouble thirty years ago: intercepting large numbers of electronic communications made by Americans. The N.S.A.'s carefully constructed rules were set aside.

Last December, the *Times* reported that the N.S.A. was listening in on calls between people in the United States and people in other countries, and a few weeks ago *USA Today* reported that the agency was collecting information on millions of private domestic calls. A security consultant working with a major telecommunications carrier told me that his client set up a top-secret high-speed circuit between its main computer complex and Quantico, Virginia, the site of a government-intelligence computer center. This link provided direct access to the carrier's network core—the critical area of its system, where all its data are stored. "What the companies are doing is worse than turning over records," the consultant said. "They're providing total access to all the data."

"This is not about getting a cardboard box of monthly phone bills in alphabetical order," a former senior intelligence official said. The Administration's goal after September 11th was to find suspected terrorists and target them for capture or, in some cases, air strikes. "The N.S.A. is getting real-time actionable intelligence," the former official said.

The N.S.A. also programmed computers to map the connections between telephone numbers in the United States and suspect numbers abroad, sometimes focussing on a geographic area, rather than on a specific person—for example, a region of Pakistan. Such calls often triggered a process, known as "chaining," in which subsequent calls to and from the American number were monitored and linked. The way it worked, one high-level Bush Administration intelligence official told me, was for the agency "to take the first number out to two, three, or more levels of separation, and see if one of them comes back"—if, say, someone down the chain was also calling the original, suspect number. As the chain grew longer, more and more Americans inevitably were drawn in.

FISA requires the government to get a warrant from a special court if it wants to eavesdrop on calls made or received by Americans. (It is generally legal for the government to wiretap a call if it is purely foreign.) The legal implications of chaining are less clear. Two people who worked on the N.S.A. call-tracking program told me they believed that, in its early stages, it did not violate the law. "We were not listening to an individual's conversation," a defense contractor said. "We were gathering data on the incidence of calls made to and from his phone by people associated with him and others." Similarly, the Administration intelligence official said that no warrant was needed, because "there's no personal identifier involved, other than the metadata from a call being placed."



General Michael Hayden

But the point, obviously, was to identify terrorists. "After you hit something, you have to figure out what to do with it," the Administration intelligence official told me. The next step, theoretically, could have been to get a suspect's name and go to the FISA court for a warrant to listen in. One problem, however, was the volume and the ambiguity of the data that had already been generated. ("There's too many calls and not enough judges in the world," the former senior intelligence official said.) The agency would also have had to reveal how far it had gone, and how many Americans were involved. And there was a risk that the court could shut down the program.

Instead, the N.S.A. began, in some cases, to eavesdrop on callers (often using computers to listen for key words) or to investigate them using traditional police methods. A government consultant told me that tens of thousands of Americans had had their calls monitored in one way or the other. "In the old days, you needed probable cause to listen in," the consultant explained. "But you could not listen in to generate probable cause. What they're doing is a violation of the spirit of the law." One C.I.A. officer told me that the Administration, by not approaching the FISA court early on, had made it much harder to go to the court later.

The Administration intelligence official acknowledged that the implications of the program had not been fully thought out. "There's a lot that needs to be looked at," he said. "We are in a technology age. We need to tweak FISA, and we need to reconsider how we handle privacy issues."

Marc Rotenberg, the executive director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center, believes that if the White House had gone to Congress after September 11th and asked for the necessary changes in FISA "it would have got them." He told me, "The N.S.A. had a lot of latitude under FISA to get the data it needed. I think the White House purposefully ignored the law, because the President did not want to do the monitoring under FISA. There is a strong commitment inside the intelligence community to obey the law, and the community is getting dragged into the mud on this."

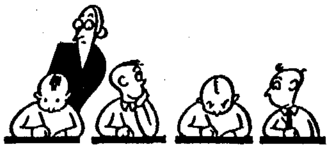
General Hayden, who as the head of the N.S.A. supervised the intercept program, is seen by many as a competent professional who was too quick to follow orders without asking enough questions. As one senior congressional staff aide said, "The concern is that the Administration says, 'We're going to do this,' and he does it—even if he knows better." Former Democratic Senator Bob Kerrey, who was a member of the 9/11 Commission, had a harsher assessment. Kerrey criticized Hayden for his suggestion, after the *Times* exposé, that the N.S.A.'s wiretap program could have prevented the attacks of 9/11. "That's patently false and an indication that he's willing to politicize intelligence and use false information to help the President," Kerrey said.

Hayden's public confirmation hearing last week before the Senate Intelligence Committee was unlike the tough-minded House and Senate investigations of three decades ago, and added little to what is known about the wiretap program. One unexamined issue was the effectiveness of the N.S.A. program. "The vast majority of what we did with the intelligence was ill-focussed and not productive," a Pentagon consultant told me. "It's intelligence in real time, but you have to know where you're looking and what you're after."

On May 11th, President Bush, responding to the *USA Today* story, said, "If Al Qaeda or their associates are making calls into the United States, or out of the United States, we want to know what they are saying." That is valid, and a well-conceived, properly supervised intercept program would be an important asset. "Nobody disputes the value of the tool," the former senior intelligence official told me. "It's the unresolved tension between the operators saying, 'Here's what we can build,' and the legal people saying, 'Just because you can build it doesn't mean you can use it.'" It's a tension that the President and his advisers have not even begun to come to terms with.

—*Seymour M. Hersh*

EXTRA CREDIT
SHADY HILL GANG



The hip-hop class for seventh and eighth graders at Shady Hill, a private school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, takes place just after lunch on Tuesdays and Fridays. The class, a practicum in the basics of rapping, is taught by a Cambridge rapper, MC Kabir, known in civilian life as Kabir Sen, in non-hip-hop circles as the son of Amartya Sen, who won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1998, and as Mr. Sen to the third graders he teaches earlier in the day. One recent Friday, the seventh graders were putting together a rap about Boston and its suburbs, and the eighth graders, who were graduating, were rapping about their memories of Shady Hill. Some of the students had written raps that were quite complicated and had trouble reaching the ends of their lines in time, and nearly everyone needed to stand up straighter and speak louder.

The eighth-grade group—four boys, plus a girl who was too embarrassed to rap but had agreed to sing the chorus—faced Kabir, who stood at the teacher's table behind his keyboard.

"You know, it's really funny how time flies," one of the boys rapped:

Three years and now it's time for my
goodbyes.
I remember my transfer in the sixth grade
And I'll never forget the impact that it
made.
It feels like the end of a dynasty—
A community—that's been so kind to me
'Cause my family, friends, and teachers
had my back.
Thanks to this school I'm on the right
track.

The next student picked up his cue:

All the times that I got in trouble,
I look at it now and it's all a bubble.
All those teachers I thought I despised
But I look back and they made me wise.

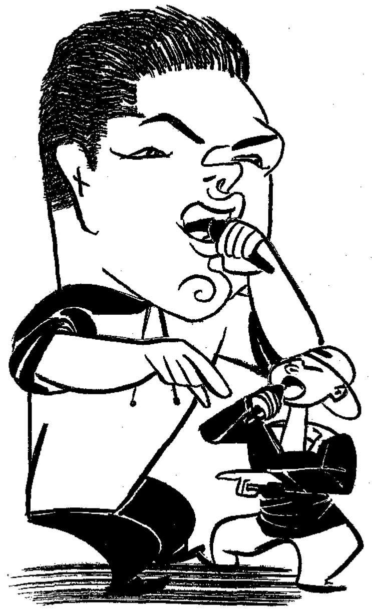
"It's a good start," Kabir said. "But now you've got to focus on memorizing your lyrics."

That week was an especially busy one for Kabir, because his third album, "Peaceful Solutions," had just been released. NPR had called, and MTV Desi wanted him to host its top-ten countdown. When his first album, "Cultural Confusion," came out, in 2002, it was featured on the cover of *Billboard*, but he told the magazine that he thought his music would never be particularly popular, and that was fine with him. Kabir likes to rap about emotions and world peace, and that places him firmly outside the hip-hop mainstream. He deplores hip-hop's preoccupation with guns and money and beating up women. "Hip-hop was not created based on hatred," he said. "It was created at giant block parties in the Bronx and Harlem, based on a very innocent notion of urban creative expression." Kabir sees his mission as restoring some of that innocence. He is, for example, on a mayoral panel charged with putting together a hip-hop festival in Boston composed of artists who are not offensive but who will draw a young inner-city audience. (So far, the panel has not come up with any such artists, but it is hopeful.)

On bad days, Kabir feels as though he were stranded on a small island of people like himself, surrounded by the huge ocean of commercial hip-hop. Sometimes he worries that guns and money and beating up women will always be more exciting than peace. He worries about boring people. "It's a constant battle for me, to come up with message-oriented raps that are not preachy," he said. "That's hard." There are other politically conscious rappers whose work he finds sympathetic, like Dilated Peoples, Jurassic 5, and Blackalicious, but he knows that if he were to act more macho his music would sell better. "There are times when I'm tempted to throw in more anger, or more swears," he said. In a song on his first album, he raps:

Brother please be careful what you write
for public consumption
'Cause I personally work with little kids
that be bumpin'
To the sounds of "gun clappin'," "bitch
slappin'." And money-having values
that to me bring shame to rappin'.

Kabir does see signs of hope. He takes note of the facts that Chuck D, of Public Enemy, is now on the academic lecture circuit, and that hip-hop textbooks are being published. He believes there will come a time when hip-hop is as acceptable as jazz, and is taught to children everywhere. "Say a kid is struggling with his times tables or the capitals of the United States," he said. "Well, if you write a rap, it'll help him retain it. And hip-hop has a great lesson to teach young people: it doesn't matter if you're a little



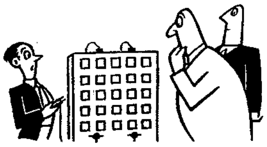
MC Kabir and student

bit nerdy, or if you're not from an urban area—you can still speak, can't you? You can be tone-deaf and you can do this—there's a space for you here."

—Larissa MacFarquhar

DEPT. OF REHABILITATION

BIG HOUSES



These have been wild years for New York real estate, and with building limited, as ever, to either up or over, instead of out, condo and co-op conversions keep getting more creative. (The list includes not only warehouses, schools, and churches but also the Jehovah's Witnesses' Bible depot, the old New York Cancer Hospital, and an Ex-Lax factory.) Now developers are poised to break residential real estate's last taboo: the correctional facility. As Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz said this spring, referring to the site of the vacant House of Detention in Boerum Hill, "It would be foolish if the city does not take advantage of this super-hot real-estate market."

Markowitz may have been inspired by his neighbors across the river: the old Parkside Correctional Facility, in Harlem, is already being turned into condos. (The building will be known as 10 Mount Morris Park West.) Its developers' efforts thus far offer an early playbook for anyone interested in breaking into the correctional-conversion sector.

One: Pick the right neighborhood. Prisons aren't usually in affluent residential districts, so if the housing is to be high end (most of the Mount Morris condominiums will list for more than a million dollars) it will need to be in a neighborhood (like the Mount Morris Park Historic District) that is already being gentrified.

Two: Allow some time to pass. A healthy interval between the departure of the last inmates and the condominium offering should help avert buyer anxiety. (Parkside has been closed for seven years.)

Three: Remove any fixtures that say "penal institution." Some reminders of Parkside's past were disposed of early on. ("We were not able to keep the cage on the roof," Beyhan Karahan, the architect, said. "It was already so damaged, and we didn't know what to do with it in an upscale residency, frankly.") But, six months into construction, the prison's front door was covered with a metal grate and still said "Parkside Correctional Facility" in peeling blue letters.

Four: Structural obstacles may prove substantial. With ceilings as low as eight feet three inches high, the dimensions of 10 Mount Morris are geared more to institutional efficiency than to luxury living. In an effort to preëmpt such criticism, the developers like to emphasize the unit's "loftlike" open floor plans. "The original windows, which were really beautiful, from the nineteen-twenties"—when Parkside was a sanitarium—"were taken down," Karahan said. "When it became a prison, they put up glazed aluminum ones, like train windows, for security reasons." Several windows were bricked over. During a recent walk-through, a construction manager gestured at a fresh hole in the exterior wall. "We had to break it open," he said. "When it was a jail, they didn't even care about the park views. It was all crazy!"

Five: Open houses can be risky, as the comments of neighbors and passersby may startle prospective buyers. Michael Johnson, who co-owns the S.R.O. across the street from 10 Mount Morris, said to a recent visitor, "Some of my neighbors didn't like the jail, but the men in my building loved it, because the women prisoners would flash them sometimes through the windows. One lady tried to escape by jumping out."

A final note: Keep an eye out for prisons with potential, even if they haven't been vacated. The Bayview Correctional Facility, on West Twentieth Street, for instance, has a rooftop garden, and, on a clear day, residents can see the Statue of Liberty. The Lincoln Correctional Facility, on 110th Street, has an exercise area on the roof with a panoramic view of Central Park. Brian Fischer, who worked at Parkside for many years, recalls his former workplace fondly. "The women didn't want to leave," he said recently. "It had a great view, and the place was air-conditioned." Fischer is now the superintendent of Sing Sing. "Talk about property values—we're on the river. Unbelievable."

—Kate Julian

MANHUNT DEPT.

WANNA BUY A PICASSO?

Last month at Sotheby's, Picasso's "Dora Maar with Cat" was purchased for ninety-five million dollars by an unidentified Russian man. The art world and the press immediately started speculating about the buyer's identity, and within a few days the *Post* announced that the mystery man was Roustam Tariko, a forty-four-year-old Russian banking and vodka tycoon. Tariko insists that the *Post* has the wrong guy. "Not me," he said last week, on the telephone from Miami, where he was attending a business conference. "Art dealers want Russian money, are now calling, calling, asking me to buy paintings. *Forbes* just named me most eligible billionaire bachelor in world. Everybody now after Russians. But I do not invest in paintings. Some of the people who do—in real estate, in oil, in fertilizer—are boring, boring, boring."

Tariko said that he read about the Sotheby's auction on his computer, while he was in his plane, a Boeing Business Jet ("Same plane developed for Jack Welch"), en route from Moscow to address an American Express conference in Santa Barbara. "They know I brought credit cards to Russia," he said. "I tell them how Russian consumers want credit. People discovering new things, new restaurants, new music. I want to bring iPod to Russia. Then I get calls about Picasso auction. One caller tells me congratulations for buying Picasso as great P.R. move. Italian aristocrat with big gallery in London calls to sell me paintings. So I escape in my Boeing Business Jet, converted, with expensive everything. I live mostly in my plane. I go and go and go in freedom.

"Russians have money," he went on. "Art dealers from all over world are now asking me to buy Picassos, other Impressionists. I prefer Renaissance, Caravaggio. But I do not buy them. I'd rather invest in my freedom, rather than in my walls."

—Lillian Ross

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ANNALS OF TERRORISM

PRIVATE JIHAD

How Rita Katz got into the spying business.

BY BENJAMIN WALLACE-WELLS

Rita Katz is tiny and dark, with volatile brown eyes, and when she is nervous or excited she can't sit still. She speaks in torrents, ten minutes at a stretch. Everybody who works in intelligence calls her Rita, even people who don't know her well. She sometimes telephones people she hasn't met—important people in the government—to tell them things that she thinks they ought to know. She keeps copies of letters from officials whose investigations into terrorism she has assisted. "You and your staff . . . were invaluable additions to the investigative team," the special agent in charge of the F.B.I.'s Salt Lake City Division wrote; the Assistant U.S. Attorney in Boise said, "You are a rare and extraordinary gem that has appeared too infrequently throughout the course of history." The letters come in handy, she told me, when she meets with skepticism or lack of interest; they are her establishment bona fides.

Katz, who was born in Iraq and speaks fluent Arabic, spends hours each day monitoring the password-protected online chat rooms in which Islamic terrorists discuss politics and trade tips: how to disperse botulinum toxin or transfer funds, which suicide vests work best. Occasionally, a chatroom member will announce that he is turning in his user name and password and going to Iraq to become a martyr, a *shaheed.* Several weeks later, his friends will post a report of the young man blowing himself up. Katz usually logs on at six in the morning. When she has guests for dinner, she leaves a laptop open on the kitchen counter, so she can check for updates. "It is completely addicting," she says. "You wake up thinking, I've been offline for seven hours, but the terrorists have been making plans."

Traditionally, intelligence has been filtered through government agencies, such as the C.I.A. and the N.S.A., which gather raw data and analyze it, and the government decides who sees the product of their work and when. Katz, who is the head of an organization called the Search for International Terrorist Entities, or SITE Institute, has made it her business to upset that monopoly. She and her researchers mine online sources for intelligence, which her staff translates and sends out by e-mail to a list of about a hundred subscribers.

Katz's client list includes people in the government who are presumably frustrated by how long it takes to get information through official channels; it also includes people in corporate security and in the media, who rarely get much useful material from the C.I.A. She has worked with prosecutors on more than a dozen terrorism investigations, and many American officers in Iraq rely on Katz's e-mails to, for example, brief their troops on the designs for explosives that are passed around terrorist Web sites. "You're thrown into Baghdad, and there are a million different groups out there you've never heard of claiming responsibility for attacks," Robert Worth, a *Times* reporter who used Katz's service during the eighteen months he spent in Iraq, told me. "Rita really knows what she's talking about—who's responsible for attacks, what's a legitimate terrorist organization and what's not." Because many reporters rebroadcast her information, it can reach the public before people in the government have had a chance to evaluate it; her organization's work is cited in the *Times* and the Washington *Post* about twice a month.

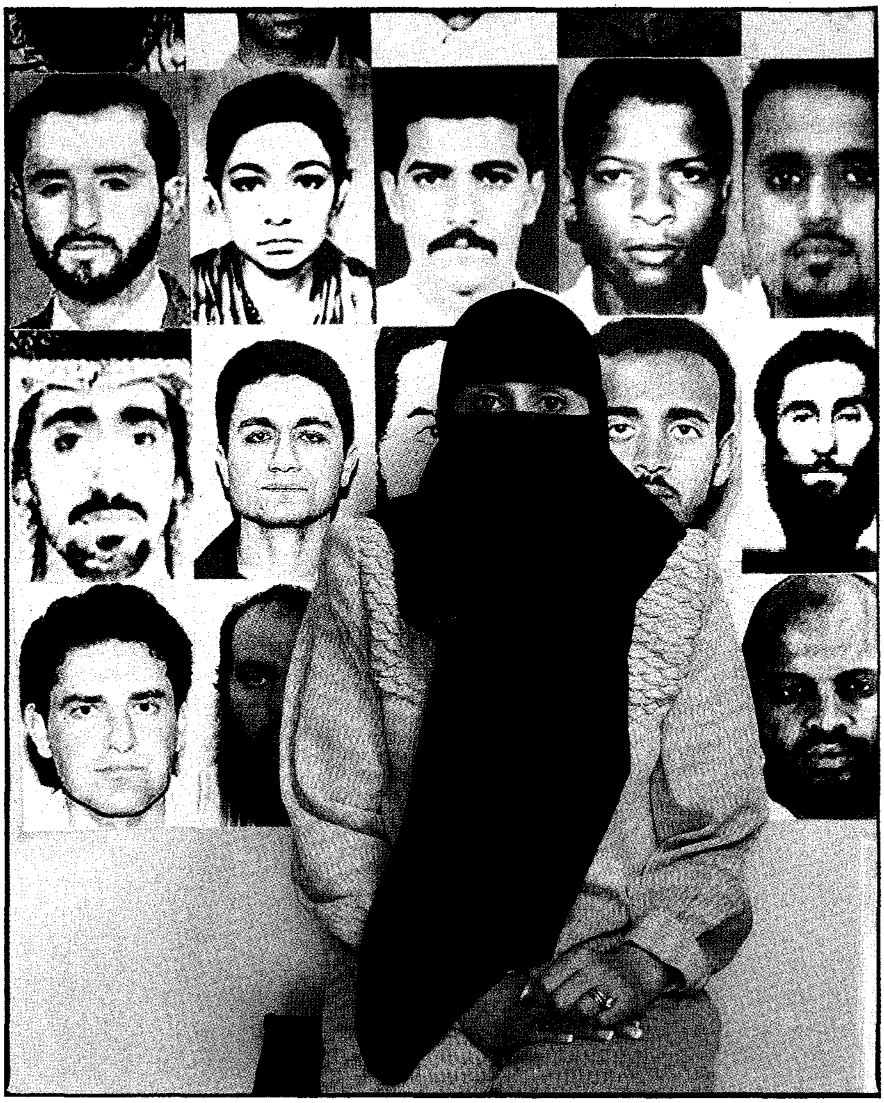
Katz has many critics, who believe that she is giving terrorists a bigger platform than they would otherwise have, and that the certainty and obsession that make her a dedicated archivist also make her too eager to find plots where they don't exist; she publicized a manual for using botulinum in terror attacks, for example, which experts later concluded was not linked to any serious threat. It's possible that her immersion in the world of terrorism has removed whatever skepticism or doubts she may have had. “Much as Al Jazeera underplays terrorist threats, the SITE Institute at times overhypes them,” Michael Scheuer, the former head of the C.I.A.'s bin Laden unit, said.

More fundamentally, some people involved in counterterrorism do not think that a private group with limited resources can do as good or as prudent a job as government agencies can. “Intelligence analysis is a set of skills that you learn, not just something that anyone can walk in off the street and pick up,” Steven Aftergood, who monitors the intelligence community for the Federation of American Scientists, told me. Katz, however, pointed out that, for example, the professionals consistently missed signals about Al Qaeda before September 11, 2001, and said that she was simply filling a gap. (A 2004 audit showed that the F.B.I. alone had thousands of hours of untranslated intercepts.) Indeed, Katz has received outsourcing contracts from the government.

Before the September 11, 2001, attacks, the official counterterrorism agencies paid relatively little attention to the jihadis' online presence. But in the past few years that has changed, in large measure because of changes in the way terror networks operate. “Nearly everything about Al Qaeda that matters is happening online right now,” Peter Bergen, a journalist and terrorism expert, said. Some analysts believe that Al Qaeda today is a model of what is called “leaderless resistance”: self-appointed cells operating with help and inspiration from materials that they find online. Traffic rose dramatically after Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the head of Al Qaeda in Iraq, posted a video of the beheading of the American contractor Nicholas Berg.

“It's not as if Al Qaeda were inventing this,” Jessica Stern, a terrorism specialist who served on the National Security Council under President Clinton, said. What's unique about Islamic terror and the Internet is that there is up-to-the-minute access to what terrorists are thinking. Rita Katz is, in a sense, the natural complement, the engineer of a leaderless counter-resistance to the terrorist groups. “Some people think that she's a zealot,” Stern said when I asked her about Katz, “but only a zealot would provide this kind of service.”

CORBIS



Katz at the offices of the SITE Institute. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

In March, I visited Katz at her office, on the seventh floor of an old building in a Northeastern city that she refuses to allow reporters to identify in print. She told me to take a train to the city's main terminal, and then call the office for further directions. By the time I got to SITE's locked door, which has a black security camera and a plaque bearing the name of a nonexistent business, I half expected to walk into a center full of high-tech equipment, with flashing maps and screens.

The SITE Institute's office looked like a college newspaper's. There were three rooms: Katz's office, dominated by a large conference table; a small room for two translators (more work part time, from home); and what's called the pit, where several researchers and interns, all in their twenties, sat under a long, eye-level row of mug shots of wanted terrorists—mostly bearded Arab men, with grim, unsmiling glares. There was an air of intense isolation, with everyone focussed on his own projects. It was hard to ignore the office's youth; Katz told me of a new service she had added that scanned French-language terrorist sites, and that depended on an undergraduate intern who spoke fluent French (Katz has since hired another French-speaker for the service).

Each day, Katz finds about a half-dozen items on the Arabic message boards that are worth distributing. Her researchers, who monitor English-language jihadist Web sites, often find a few more. Some are propaganda: videos taking responsibility for attacks, statements of intent to attack, announcements of allegiances or splits. Others involve tactics and weapons. "You don't need to go to Afghanistan for training anymore," Katz said as we paged through a list of credit-card information that seemed to have been stolen from Houston suburbanites. "You just get it on the Internet." SITE tries to have the items translated and sent to subscribers within an hour and a half of their first appearance online; when the material could be a big news story—for instance, a new audiotape released by Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden's closest associate—SITE's translation may go on television a few minutes later. The full transcript of the video of the American reporter Jill Carroll, made by her kidnappers, was posted within twenty-five minutes.

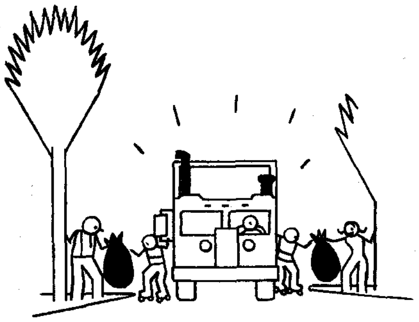
Katz has a testy relationship with the government, sometimes acting as a consultant and sometimes as an antagonist. About a year ago, a SITE staffer, under an alias, managed to join an exclusive jihadist message board that, among other things, served as a debarkation point for many would-be suicide bombers. For months, the staffer pretended to be one of the jihadis, joining in chats and watching as other members posted the chilling messages known as "wills," the final sign-offs before martyrdom. The staffer also passed along technical advice on how to keep the message board going. Eventually, he won the confidence of the site's Webmasters, who were impressed with his computer skills, and he gained access to the true e-mail addresses of the members and other information about them. After monitoring the site for several more days, the staffer told Katz that one of the site's members, a young Muslim man in a European country, had just posted a will. "It was obvious that he was planning to become a martyr very soon," Katz said.

Katz called officials in Washington, and was met with institutional resistance: "They said, 'Oh, Rita, I'm not sure you should even be communicating with them—you might be providing material support!' And they wanted to get approval from the Department of Justice to look at the e-mails. I said, 'Look, we have to do something.' " Katz then called an American counterterrorism official stationed in the young man's country, and he, in turn, sent the jihadi's e-mails to local investigators. Within twenty-four hours, they had him under surveillance, and a week later they arrested him. "In my opinion, they probably wouldn't have had a clue if it hadn't been for Rita," the official told me. This, Katz said, is what she always hopes to achieve: "It's one case where everything just worked so well."

At the SITE office, Katz showed me some suicide-bombing videos from Iraq. They are often five or ten minutes long, overlaid with religious chanting. In one video, a middle-aged Iraqi doctor straps on a suicide vest. "In Israel, they always told you that the profile of a suicide bomber was someone young, without family, from the lowest economic level, but what we see here over and over is just the opposite," Katz said.

We watched the last day in the life of Abu Mouwayia al-Shimali, a chubby, bespectacled Saudi. Shimali discusses a letter purportedly written by a female prisoner at Abu Ghraib named Fatima, describing nightly public rapes of female prisoners by American guards. The letter is apocryphal, but it has circulated widely online, and has become a rallying point for the Iraqi insurgency. Shimali does not sound unhinged or bloodthirsty; he sounds humble.

Shimali is shown waving as he walks to a car. Then he is in the driver's seat, with a rifle in his lap, patting a clunky metal apparatus next to him. His smile is warm, and he is speaking in a measured tone. "He is saying, 'This is my bomb,' " Katz translated. The car pulls up to a dusty checkpoint manned by American and Iraqi soldiers, and then explodes. SITE distributed the video two days after it was posted. As you watch, it feels not like an advertisement for homicide but like an advertisement for belief. Katz told me that even she, watching such videos, could imagine wanting to become a suicide bomber.

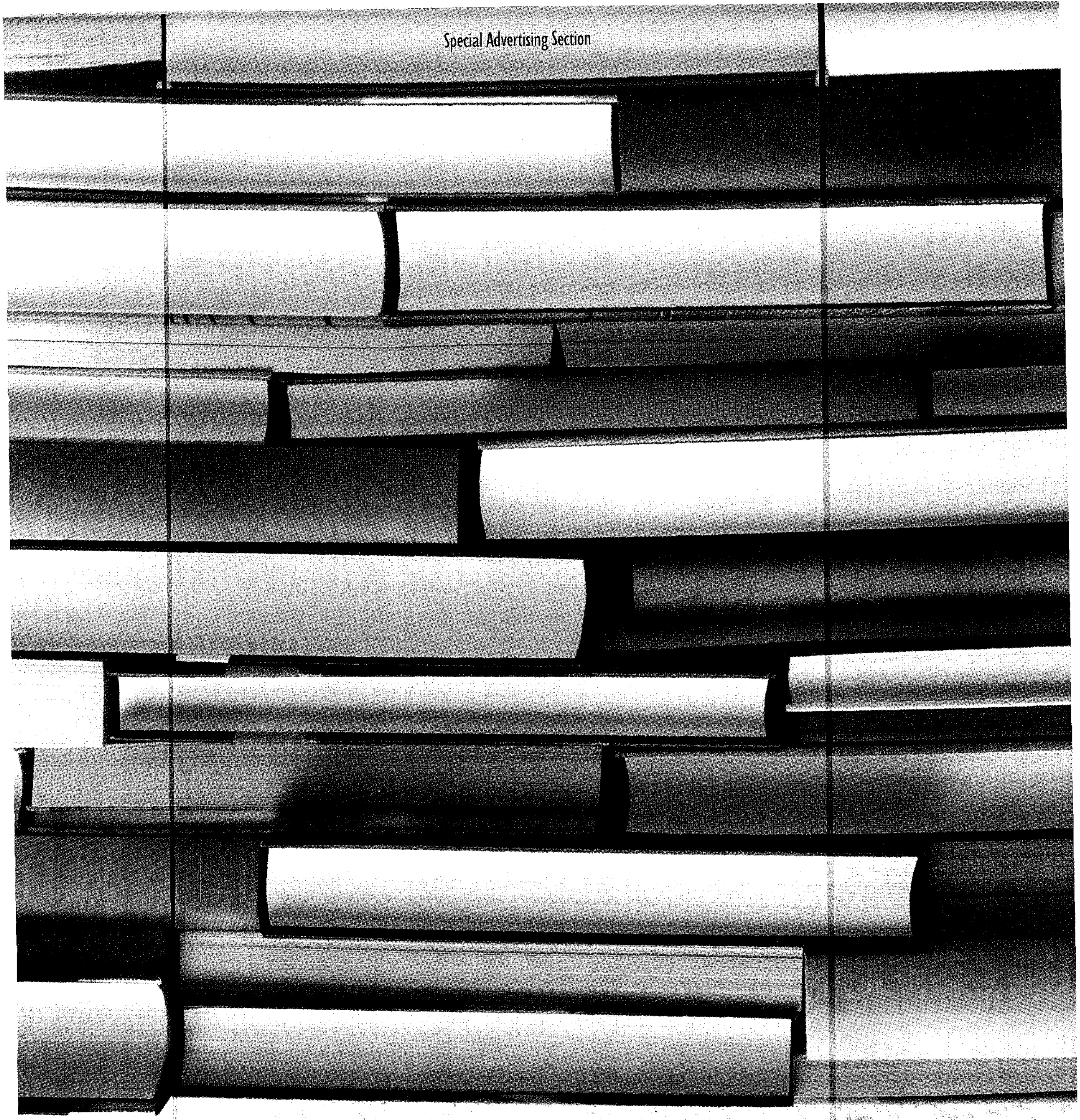


Katz believes that America has so far understood the terrorist threat only in bastardized and insufficient terms. She believes that it is wrong to assert, as President Bush does, that terrorists are motivated by hatred for our freedoms rather than by our policies in the Middle East or those of their own governments. Though she herself is circumspect about the issue of Iraq, some members of her staff believe that the war is a distraction from the fight with radical Islamic terrorism. But Katz also believes that terrorists are more sophisticated and resilient than most Americans realize, that the war against radical Islam is likely to last for decades, and that the outcome is far from clear. Her project is, in large measure, to convince Americans of the seriousness of the threat by building a direct conduit to the terrorist mind.

"What makes Rita unique is her background," Peter Probst, a terrorism consultant and retired C.I.A. officer who works with Katz, told me. "Because of what she'd been through, she understood the threat earlier and better than most of us."

Katz was born in Basra, Iraq, in 1963, one of four children of a wealthy Jewish businessman. In 1968, in the wake of the Six-Day War, the Baath government, with Saddam Hussein as its head of security, encouraged attacks against Iraqi Jews. Some Jews from prominent families were arrested and charged with spying for Israel, among them Katz's father. After he was imprisoned, his wife and children were transported to Baghdad and kept under house arrest in a stone hut. Katz's father was convicted in a military tribunal and executed, in 1969, with eight other Jews and five non-Jews, in a public hanging in Baghdad's central square. Hundreds of thousands of cheering Iraqis attended; the government offered free transportation to people from the provinces, and belly dancers performed for the crowd. Katz was six years old.

After the family had been living in the hut for months, Katz's mother drugged



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BEHIND THE BEST-SELLERS

By Michael Archer

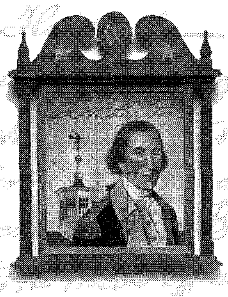
An old publishing story says when Random House co-founder Bennett Cerf was asked to come up with a winning title for an upcoming book, he thought for a moment about the hot topics of that time before responding, "'Lincoln's Doctor's Dog.'" Whether the anecdote is true or not, that theory, playing to the current reading public's obsessions, still seems valid. Anyone for "Jesus' Gospel for the Templar?"

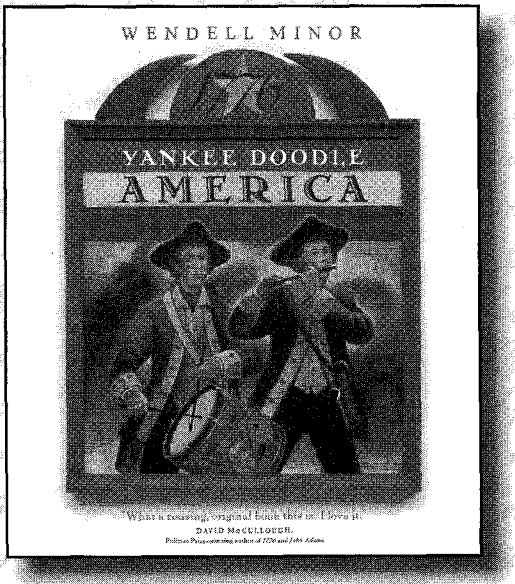
Allegra Goodman
Marley & Me
organic
Sarah Dessen
Just Listen

"The Da Vinci Code" was published more than three years ago, but its author, Dan Brown, is still sitting at the head of the best-seller table. (In fact, now that the novel is out in paperback, he sits at the head of *three* best-seller tables—hardcover, trade, and mass market.) When Brown looks down from his height, he sees many disciples, and they come from all parts of the publishing kingdom. "'The Da Vinci Code' is obviously the source of this Jesus explosion on the best-seller list," says Susan Moldow, Scribner's executive vice president and publisher. "And what's interesting about it is it goes across fiction and nonfiction categories. 'Chick lit' didn't spawn a bunch of self-help books for women. This is far and away the biggest book to have influence."

Excluding Brown's novels, recent titles appearing on the New York *Times* best-seller fiction list include "The Templar Legacy," "The Secret Supper," and "The Last Templar." The nonfiction list has even more divine intervention with "American Theocracy," "The Jesus Papers," "The Gospel of Judas," "Misquoting Jesus," and "American Gospel," among several others.

Just as Brown affected the adult book market, J.K. Rowling reinvented the young-adult category, which the industry calls YA. Recent best-sellers in that category include books with wide adult appeal (Stephenie Meyer's vampire romance "Twilight") and titles that deal with subject matter such as Nazi Germany (Markus Zusak's "The Book Thief"). The market's growth is also making it change: "We find ourselves doing books that track older and older and, by the same token, adult books that track younger and younger," says Doug Whiteman, president, Penguin Young Readers Group. "It's the 'Harry

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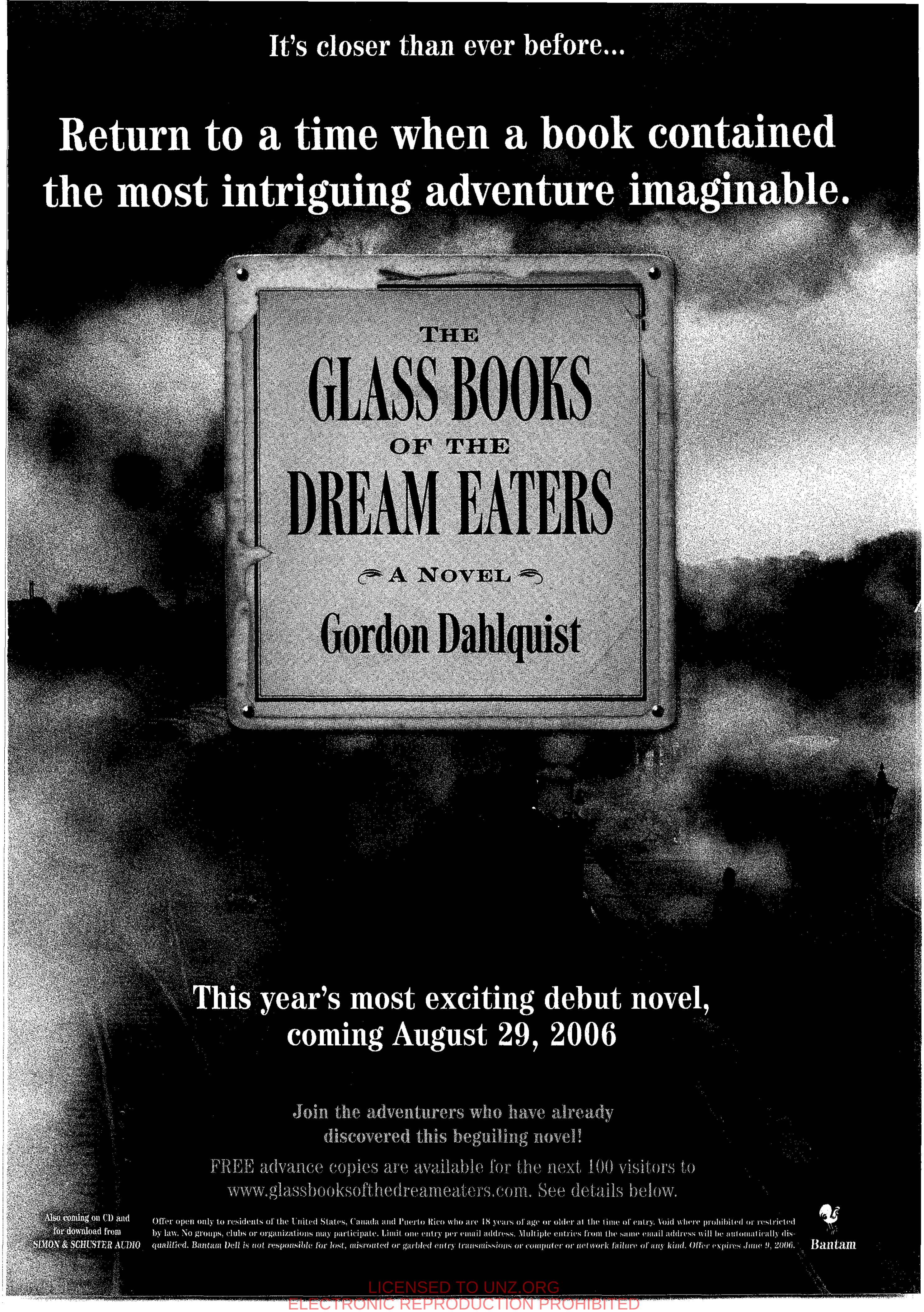

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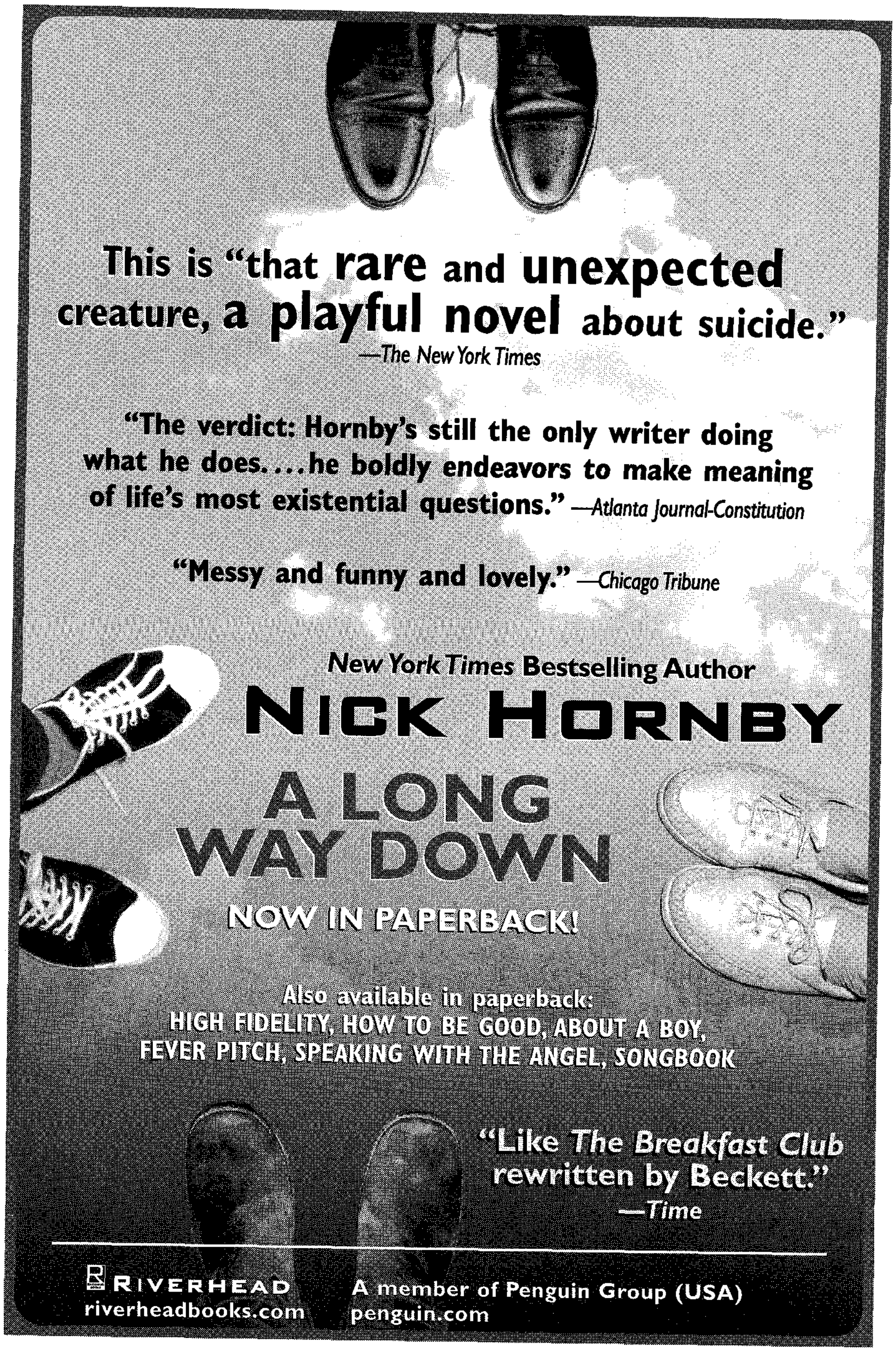
Potter' factor—it emanated from children's books but brought so many adult readers into the young fantasy category." Adds Daisy Kline, vice president of marketing, Random House Children's Books, "Ultimately, it's good for our industry because we're creating lifelong readers. Ten years ago, no one could have anticipated how the boundaries between traditional adult and children's publishing could have broken down."

MAKING A LIST

Writing a best-seller is a long shot. According to Daisy Maryles, executive editor at *Publishers Weekly*, "The number of books published in 2005 is estimated to be close to 200,000, and that includes everything—adult and children's books, professional books and textbooks, paperbacks and hardcovers. The 442 new adult titles that made it onto *PW*'s four weekly lists last year represent a mere 0.2 per cent of that annual output."

Publishers Weekly is one of more than forty rankings now reporting on book sales either nationally or regionally. Due to reputation and circulation, the New York *Times* best-seller list is the publishers' Holy Grail. *Publishers Weekly* and *USA Today* make lists based on national surveys. Other major newspapers publish lists that rank sales in their region. The American Booksellers Association's Book Sense list ranks only independent bookstore sales from different regions of the country. All vary in methodology and focus, so "best-seller" can be ambiguous. "People tend to be generous in what constitutes a best-seller, I would say," says Scribner's Moldow. "'Look, it's on the New England Booksellers Association Book Sense list—it's a best-seller.' Yeah, it's a word that definitely gets abused."

Still, whether for the ease of choosing a book in a saturated marketplace or the desire to be included in the mainstream, readers are drawn to the stamp of popularity. A book's appearance on a best-seller list seems to encourage more sales (and, if it's not a first-time author, helps backlist sales). The importance of a book recognized as a best-seller can


This is "that rare and unexpected creature, a playful novel about suicide."
—The New York Times

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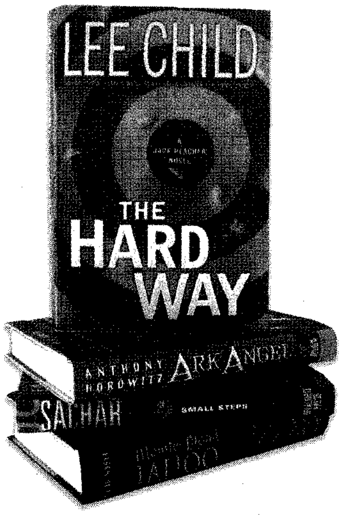
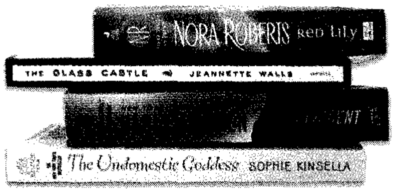



NORA ROBERTS red lily
THE GLASS CASTLE JEANNETTE WALLS
The Undomestic Goddess SOPHIE KINSELLA

also be seen in the way many publishers pitch new books to their sales force, bookstores, and the media. "No publisher is immune to saying a book is 'Kitchen Confidential meets The Devil Wears Prada.' It's irresistible," says Moldow. "Whether or not that helps consumers, I have no idea, but everybody wants to be associated with success."

Chances are, most buyers wouldn't notice if a book were to appear on only one list—with the possible exception of the New York *Times*. "More lists are healthy. They put more books in the spotlight," says Random House's Kline.

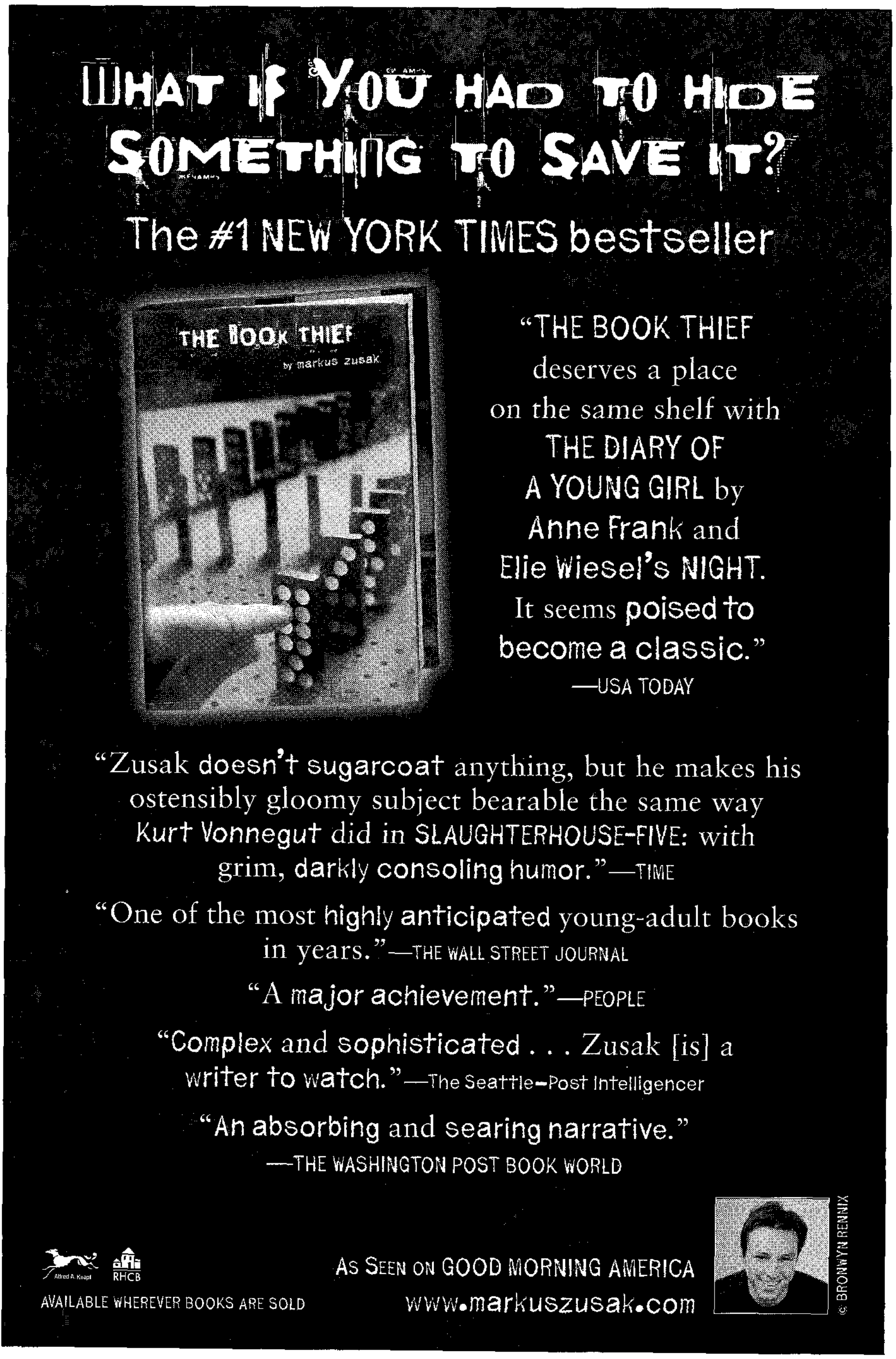
ALIGNING THE STARS

Ask publishers what makes a best-seller and you're likely to hear either "I have no idea" or "word of mouth." Generally, word of mouth must start in-house, many weeks before a book is shipped. John Grogan's "Marley & Me," which has enjoyed a long stay on the *Times* nonfiction list, was purchased at auction by William Morrow because of the excitement it generated at the publishing house's initial read. As is typical with popular manuscripts at most publishers, copies of the book were passed throughout its departments. "By the time we got to the sales conference, people were standing up and giving testimonials about the book," says Lisa Gallagher, William Morrow's senior vice president and publisher. "One person said, 'I thought I hated dogs and then I read this and went and bought a dog.'"

Once book publishers have decided to heavily back a book, the marketing machine revs up. "To create a best-seller, the stars need to align," says Gallagher, "but we need to do as much as possible to give them an opportunity to align." One now-common practice is distributing a large number of advance copies to reviewers, bookstores, and "big mouths" (industry opinion makers) in hopes that the book will get noticed. The best-selling "Labyrinth" had a huge advance-copy mailing, according to Rick Pascocello, Berkley Publishing Group's vice president and director of marketing. Still, the book has to deliver. Pascocello says if you ask people why they buy books, "it might be from reviews, but generally it's because somebody recommended it."

WHAT'S WORKING

While publishers certainly value a rave review, it doesn't make or break a potential best-seller. Says a former New York *Times Book Review* editor on how much influence critics have in the making of best-sellers, "Not very much and less now, to the degree that a book's success is determined by forces outside the book's merit, like brand names and awareness."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"One of the most highly anticipated young-adult books in years."—THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

"A major achievement."—PEOPLE

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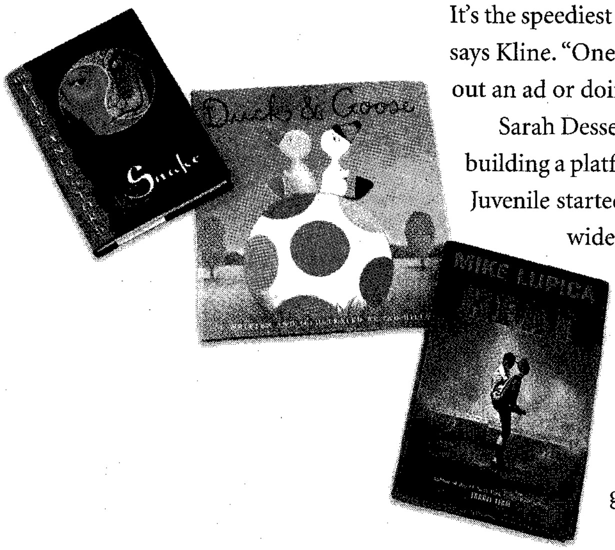
For that reason, publishers look for authors with proven track records. Known entities such as Frank McCourt, whose memoir "Teacher Man" was published in November, and authors with large platforms, or name recognition, such as TV personality Dr. Phil, are considered safer bets. In children's publishing, an author with a successful series, such as Mary Pope Osborne's "Magic Tree House" books, is as near a can't-miss as may exist.

For authors who have not yet reached those levels, the Internet can be a viable avenue. It's the speediest way to spread word of mouth and know if it's working. "It's quantifiable," says Kline. "One of the problems with marketing is how to quantify the effects of taking out an ad or doing a gorilla promotion."



Sarah Dessen, the author of the best-selling young-adult novel "Just Listen," has been building a platform for years by being an active blogger. In addition, the publisher Viking Juvenile started podcasting Dessen speaking about her books. "It certainly seems to be widening her audience," says Whiteman. "This is the first hardcover book on which she cracked the list."

Another trend shows publishers concentrating on reaching reader groups across the country. Like many marketing focuses, it's tough to know exactly how much it's helping book sales, but as Betsy Hulsebosch, a Bantam senior vice president, points out, "There's almost always an expert at a bookstore who helps to inform local reading groups. And it's always good when you can tell one person who then tells twelve people."

In children's and young-adult publishing, the crossover success of adult titles such as "Who Moved My Cheese?" may have opened a broad

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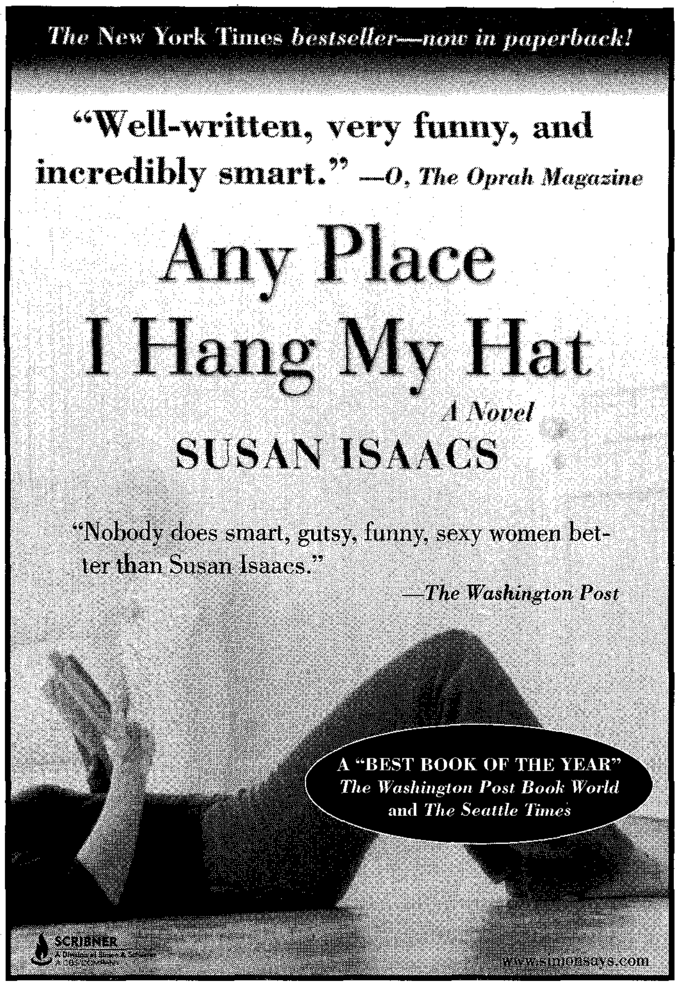

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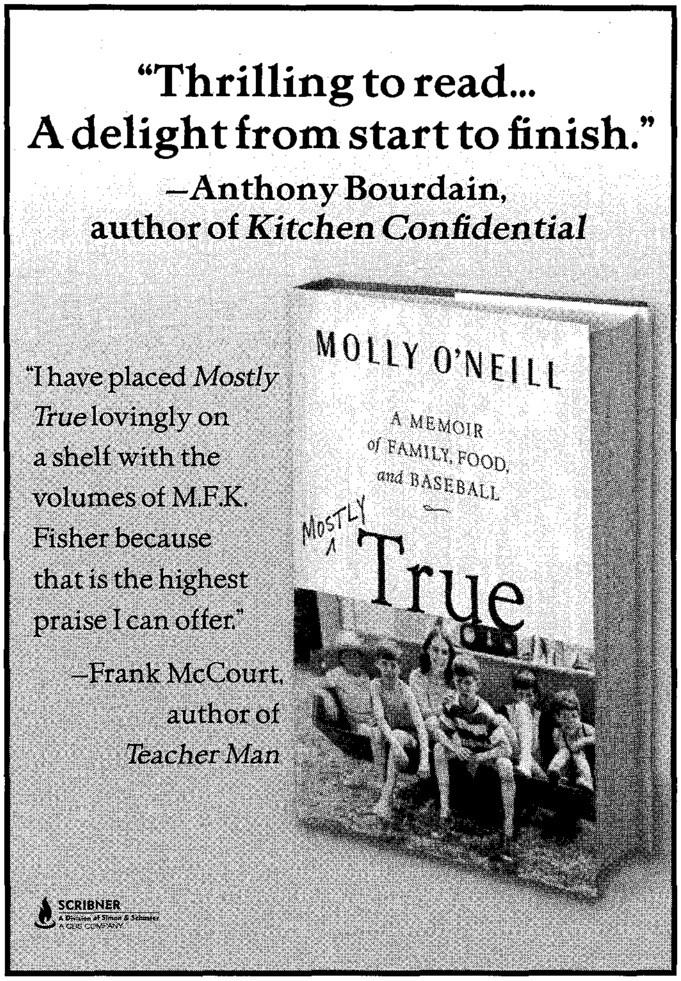

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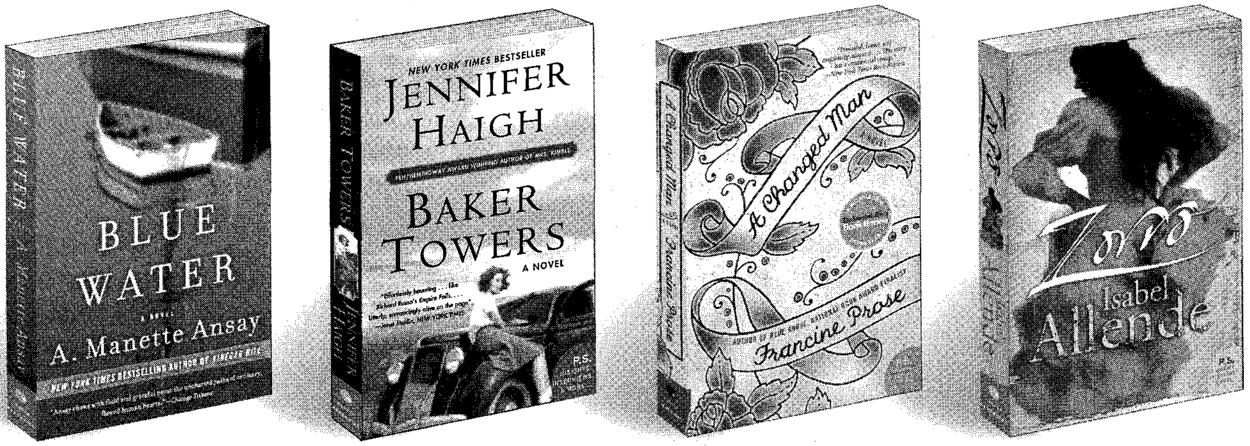
and lasting market. Whiteman expects great things from the illustrated version of "Eats, Shoots & Leaves," to be released in July. And the success of Carl Hiaasen and Mike Lupica, among others, has some publishers eyeing other adult authors.

THE FUTURE IS READ

Electronic books, which can be downloaded from computers, have been largely targeted toward adults. (In 2000, Stephen King's "Riding the Bullet" was the first such best-seller.) But advances in computer-graphic capabilities are improving to the point where E-books will someday be a viable platform even for children's picture books. Podcasts, meanwhile, are becoming an industry standard in nearly all categories. Technology is likely, therefore, to play an ever-larger role in the making of best-sellers. Nobody, however, seems to be able to predict exactly how this will occur.

Not being able to predict the future shape of publishing may be appropriate, because no one could have anticipated the ongoing surge in religious-quest books. No one can even predict if there will be a "Marley & Me" factor next year. "I'd like to say best-sellers won't matter in the future, when everything is more niche-driven, the way broadcast television isn't going to matter because there are increasingly more channels," says Moldow. "But I don't see that happening, at least not in my lifetime. Any claim you can make to any work having been a best-seller is the best thing you can use to sell the next one. I'm afraid we're fully immersed in the best-seller culture for the foreseeable future."

Michael Archer is a frequent contributor to Publishers Weekly, *among other magazines, and editor of Guernicamag.com.*



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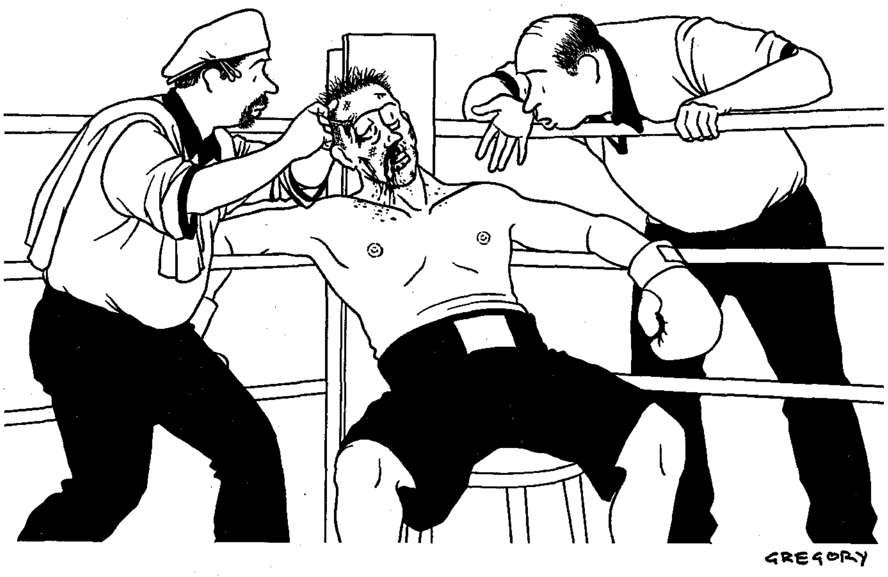


"Sure, he's pulverizing your face, but you're chipping away at his likability."

the guards and escaped with the children. By pretending to be the wife of a well-known Iraqi general, a woman she faintly resembled, she got the family first to the Iranian border and then to Israel. They settled in a small seaside town called Bat-Yam. Katz did her military service in the Israel Defense Forces after high school, and studied politics and history at Tel Aviv University. She married a medical student, and went into business with her mother, manufacturing clothes; Katz handled sales. In 1997, Katz's husband won a fellowship to do research in endocrinology at the National Institutes of Health, and they moved to Washington with their three children. (They later had a fourth.)

The particulars of her biography—her father's execution, her escape from Iraq, and her education in Israel—give Katz, in the eyes of some in the counterterrorism community, a kind of bionic character, as if she had been designed to hunt down terrorists. Her friends and allies are awed by her background; her critics find in it reason to be suspicious of her motives. Katz claims to attach no special meaning to it. "I would have to think about that," she said, when I asked her if her early life had made her particularly sensitive to the terrorist threat. Later, she told me, "I know that the people who killed my father aren't the same as the jihadis, but obviously I would never have got interested in the politics of this part of the world if it weren't for his execution." (She also said, "When you grow up in a place like Iraq, you understand maybe a little bit about how Arabs think, and also what they are capable of.")

Katz's first nine months in the United States were lonely—"I cried on the phone to my mama every day"—and she abruptly quit the one job she held, as an assistant in a suburban gift shop. (She didn't get along with her boss.) She saw an ad for an Arabic-speaking research assistant, applied for the job, and got it. Her employer was the Investigative Project, run by Steven Emerson, a former reporter with an interest in terror networks. Emerson became widely known in the aftermath of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, when, appearing as an expert on CBS News, he theorized that the attack was the work of Islamic extremists. It turned out that Timothy McVeigh was responsible.

The Investigative Project was an exciting place to be. By the mid-nineties, the Internet had begun to change intelligence gathering profoundly, allowing groups like Emerson's to emerge—self-styled spies who relied on the floods of "open source" information available online—tax records, credit reports, Internet newsletters written by people in Belgrade or Indonesia. Senior counterterrorism officials had been slow to take open-source information seriously. "It was seen as irrelevant, and they much preferred working with spies and satellites," Timothy Naftali, of the University of Virginia, who wrote a history of American counterterrorism for the 9/11 Commission, said. Katz would start with the name of an organization, or an individual, and pore over records to find out who was associated with whom, whether they were sending money overseas, what they were writing. She was amazed at what she could discover. She began joining message boards related to a particular group or mosque and chatting with her subjects online, pretending to be a Muslim man.

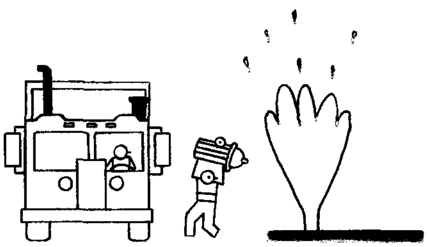
The Investigative Project also did undercover work at Islamic fund-raisers and rallies. "Our families all thought we were nuts," Evan Kohlmann, who worked with Katz and Emerson, said. (Kohlmann now runs his own Web-based consultancy, globalterroralert.com.) The I.P. sometimes sent Katz to events where non-Muslims would stand out; she pretended to be the wife of a radical Iraqi-American businessman. She taped crowds outside the Israeli Embassy screaming in Arabic, "Jew, Jew, Muhammad is coming to get you." At particularly radical fund-raisers and conferences, she wore a burka, spoke a deferential Iraqi-accented Arabic, and sat apart from the men, averting her eyes. By volunteering to send cash to the families of suicide bombers, she said, she figured out which organizations were funnelling money to them. She openly videotaped events, as true believers do, and, she said, "sometimes when I had trouble holding the video camera, they would be very polite and hold it for me." She became so consumed by this work—telephoning her house from other cities at odd hours and telling her family that she'd be back in a day or two but couldn't say why—that her husband suspected her of having an affair.

On December 14, 1999, an Algerian named Ahmed Ressam was arrested as he tried to cross the border from Canada with a trunk full of materials for an explosive device that he intended to detonate at Los Angeles International Airport. Richard A. Clarke, who was then President Clinton's counterterrorism adviser, called Emerson from the White House and asked the Investigative Project for a report on militant Islamic cells in North America. The worry was that Ressam was part of a larger plot planned for the millennium. Each day for the next two weeks, Kohlmann, Katz, Emerson, and two other analysts stayed at the office until well past midnight, looking through public records and other sources. Katz became convinced that she was looking at a single global network of terror. "We began to realize how big it was, and how little anyone knew about it," she said, "and it just began to swallow me up."

On September 11, 2001, Kohlmann, then in law school, raced out of class and called Katz. "She said, 'Time to get to work.'" But by the following June Katz and Emerson, both combative personalities, had parted ways. Taking two staff members from the Investigative Project, Katz set up her own office. She got by on small government contracts. Some of that work, done for the Treasury Department, involved identifying Islamic groups that might be sending money to terrorist organizations. She also had a contract with the Swiss government and with a group of relatives of 9/11 victims who were suing Saudi Arabian officials, businesses, and charities. Still, during the first two years, Katz said, she couldn't always pay salaries.

But Katz's organization had embedded itself in the Internet, and when a part-time P.R. consultant whom Katz brought in suggested that she start a subscription service, Katz sent out an e-mail to people and groups she had worked with. In a few weeks, SITE had a few dozen subscribers, each paying twenty-five hundred dollars annually. (SITE is a nonprofit organization, and also raises money from private donors.)

The world of private, open-source counterterrorism operations is tiny—a few dozen people, if you're counting liberally—and it tends to have the same characteristics as other self-appointed, at-the-barricades élites, like the neoconservatives, or the old American left, or, for that matter, an underground terrorist organization. There are the same personal allegiances and petty feuds, the same mixture of importance and self-importance. Kohlmann and Josh Devon, who left the Investigative Project with Katz and helped set up SITE, have been friends since middle school. They finished college in 2001. Kohlmann has long hair and a beard and is aided in his work, he said, "by looking like the kind of grad-school, hippie American that Islamic terrorists think they can recruit"; Devon has curly hair and always looks slightly surprised. When I asked Devon whether they had given much thought to the implications of selling intelligence by subscription, he said, "We were just trying to survive."



In May, 2003, Katz published, anonymously, a memoir about her work, called "Terrorist Hunter." (She was exposed as its author soon afterward.) The book is as psychologically blunt as she is, and the tone, at times, verges on smugness; the F.B.I., she writes, didn't "possess one-thousandth of my knowledge on the relevant issues." It is also an account, in almost religious terms, of her revelation about the threat and reach of global Islamic terrorism. Not that Katz goes through any real conversion in the course of the book; the only change is the slow, mechanical development of naïveté into experience, of suspicion into conviction, like water into steam.

That month, Katz went on "60 Minutes" to promote "Terrorist Hunter," and to talk about her investigation into terrorist financing. Wearing a wig, five hours' worth of makeup, and a large fake nose to conceal her identity, Katz also suggested that Mar-Jac Poultry, a Georgia chicken farm, was sending money to terrorists. She speculated that the company had hidden the transfers by selling chickens that it had recorded in its books as dead. Mar-Jac sued Katz and CBS. (The suit is still pending.) "This woman knows nothing about money laundering, and she sure as hell knows nothing about poultry," Mar-Jac's lawyer, Wilmer Parker, told me.

Katz said that her information was sound, but the publicity from the suit was not good. And there were other setbacks. In 2004, after she spent months helping the Department of Justice prepare a case

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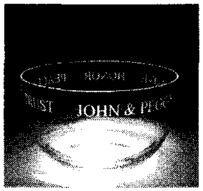

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against a young University of Idaho computer scientist named Sami Omar al-Hussayen for giving material support to terrorists, a jury acquitted him.

The invasion of Iraq opened up new opportunities for small, private groups like SITE, and as the war went on, and the insurgency continued to grow, SITE provided instantaneous bits of information to keep up with the news cycle. "It's like when CNN came on the scene in the Gulf War, with twenty-four-hour news—it forever changed the field," Bruce Hoffman, a counterterrorism expert at RAND told me. "SITE sends out six, seven e-mails a day, and the stuff is good, and it forces everyone else to play catch-up."

SITE's detractors have also questioned the quality, or, rather, the possible slant, of SITE's translations—an especially troubling issue given the shortage of alternatives. "An Arabic word can have four or five different meanings in translation," Michael Scheuer, the former C.I.A. analyst, said. SITE, in his view, always picks the "most warlike translation."

"Our translations are as close as we can get to the original language," Katz told me. "We have native speakers who do them, and I definitely don't tell the native speakers what word to use—I am too busy to do that."

Last December, Katz was reading a jihadist message board called Al Safanat when she discovered a manual describing how to attack the Alaska pipeline. She was struck by the level of detail: the manual recommended that an élite cell of four or five men equipped with armor-piercing bullets or explosives sneak across the border into Alaska from Canada. "They spilled our brothers' blood and they stole our oil resources," it said. "This is our time to teach them a lesson." SITE sent the manual to its subscribers that day.

Soon afterward, the Anchorage *Daily News* published an article on the threat, crediting SITE for the information. "That's when everything went crazy," Katz said. Other reports followed, and soon Katz's phone was ringing so frequently that she was overwhelmed. Things were even more overwhelming for workers on the pipeline. "We were already in communication with local, state, and federal officials," Mike Heatwole, a spokesman for the company that manages the pipeline, said. When the media reports of the manual came out, Heatwole's company sent internal memos reassuring its employees and their spouses that there was no credible threat. "The situation we don't want to be in is to have CNN on in our facilities and someone on TV saying, 'This just in—terrorist threat to the pipeline,' and all our workers and their families saying, 'Oh, no!' "

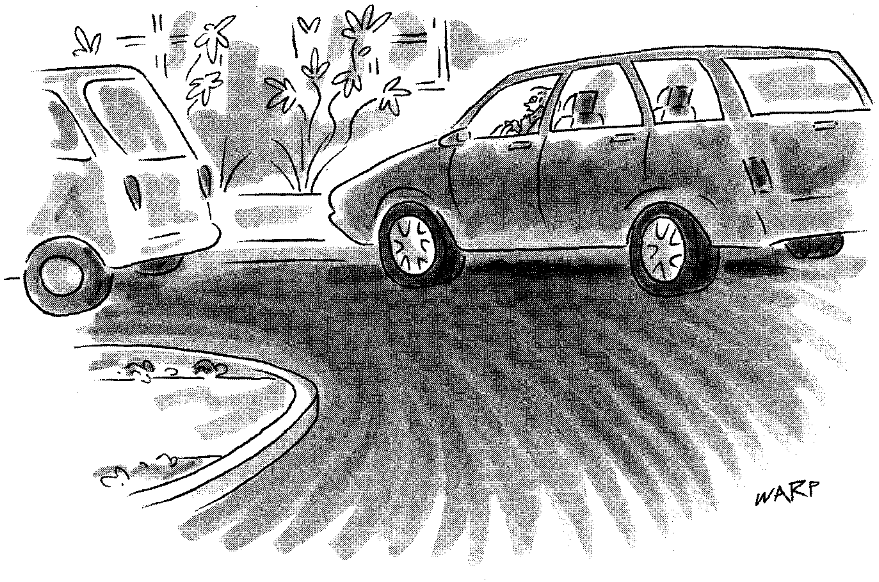
Katz conceded that her group doesn't check the scientific accuracy of each manual, or the legitimacy of every threat—although she tries to make sure that the Web site that a particular item appears on has produced credible threats in the past, and that the threat seems serious. And, she said, vetting isn't her role. "I'm telling people what terrorists are thinking," Katz says. "Wouldn't you rather know that they're thinking about the Alaska pipeline, even if this manual wouldn't work?"

There are hundreds of extremist Web sites, but there is also a hierarchy: sites on which terrorist groups release statements and videos have the most devoted audiences. As soon as something appears, users post it on dozens of message boards, chat rooms, and blogs. For much of the past two years, activity centered on a board called Ansar; once it was shut down, with its British-based Webmaster imprisoned for his part in a bomb plot, users shifted to a board called Al Hesbah. "There was absolutely no disruption," Katz said.

Al Hesbah has several thousand regular users, and most log on from Europe and the Middle East. The tone of the conversation is respectful—"brother" is the universal term of greeting—and dissent is not tolerated. Once in a while, someone will ask whether it is justifiable to kill Muslims or women in the course of jihad in Iraq, but in the past year, according to Rebecca Givner-Forbes, an analyst with the Terrorism Research Center, "that has pretty much stopped."

One afternoon early last fall, Katz came across a new thread. It was about her. A jihadi had posted a link to the SITE Institute's Web site. "The SITE is lurking," he wrote. Its people were on the boards, using false names and acting as spies. He urged his brothers to ferret them out and expel them.

But another poster responded that SITE might be providing a valuable service. He wrote, "They translate the statements into English on our behalf, and they do not analyze them. Why do we not grab the opportunity?" Eventually, a moderator on the site weighed in: "All right, men, do not argue. We will carry out an election, and then we will see if we should keep them or expel them—what do you think? I am a democratic operative, don't you think?" He ended with a



"Hey, baby, I just dropped the kids off at school, and now I'm going to the grocery store, and then I'm going home and unloading the car—am I making you hot?"

smiley-face emoticon. By the time attention shifted to a new thread, opinion was running fifty-fifty as to whether SITE was, on balance, good for jihad.

Terrorism is, in part, theatre and psychological warfare, and many of the statements that Katz translates are propaganda intended to raise the profile of obscure groups. Katz sees her audience mainly as professionals—people whose job it is to stop terrorism or uncover it. But, by creating a shortcut around government agencies, she may also be contributing to the tendency that the media (and at times the government) has displayed since 9/11 to dramatize even the flimsiest threat. In recent months, Katz has noticed Algerian radicals and Afghan terrorists releasing videos that mirror Zarqawi's in substance and tone and that are also designed to impress young militants in the West. Katz believes that the terrorists have been underestimated, and that more people should have direct access to what they are thinking and saying. The terrorists, of course, think so, too.

Katz has a very specific vision of the counterterrorism problem, which she shares with most of the other contractors and consultants who do what she does. They believe that the government has failed to appreciate the threat of Islamic extremism, and that its feel for counterterrorism is all wrong. As they see it, the best way to fight terrorists is to go at it not like G-men, with two-year assignments and query letters to the staff attorneys, but the way the terrorists do, with fury and the conviction that history will turn on the decisions you make—as an obsession and as a life style. Worrying about overestimating the threat is beside the point, because underestimating the threat is so much worse.

"The problem isn't Rita Katz—the problem is our political conversation about terrorism," Timothy Naftali says. "Now, after September 11th, there's no incentive for anyone in politics or the media to say the Alaska pipeline's fine, and nobody's cows are going to be poisoned by the terrorists. And so you have these little eruptions of anxiety. But, for me, look, the world is wired now: either you take the risks that come with giving people—not just the government—this kind of access to information or you leave them. I take them." ♦

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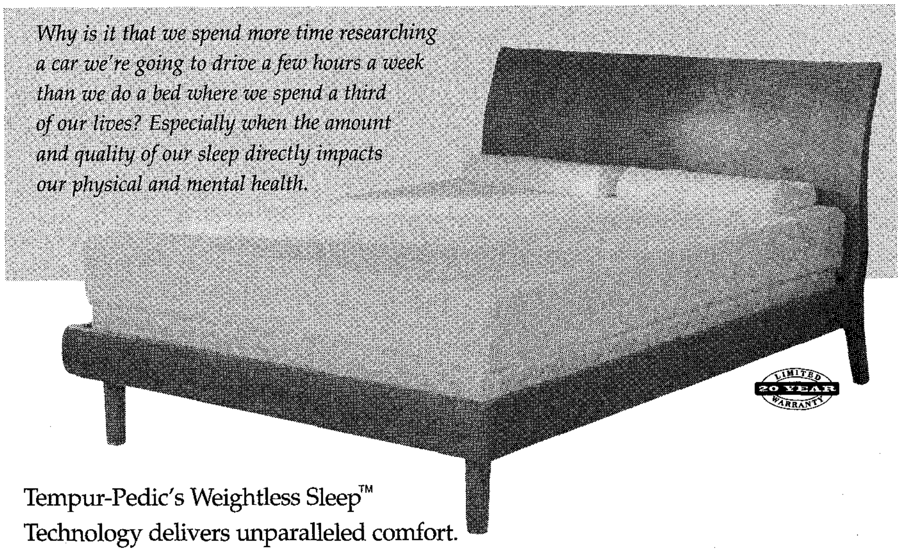

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Robert Mankoff, 1993

"Let's do it, let's fall in love."

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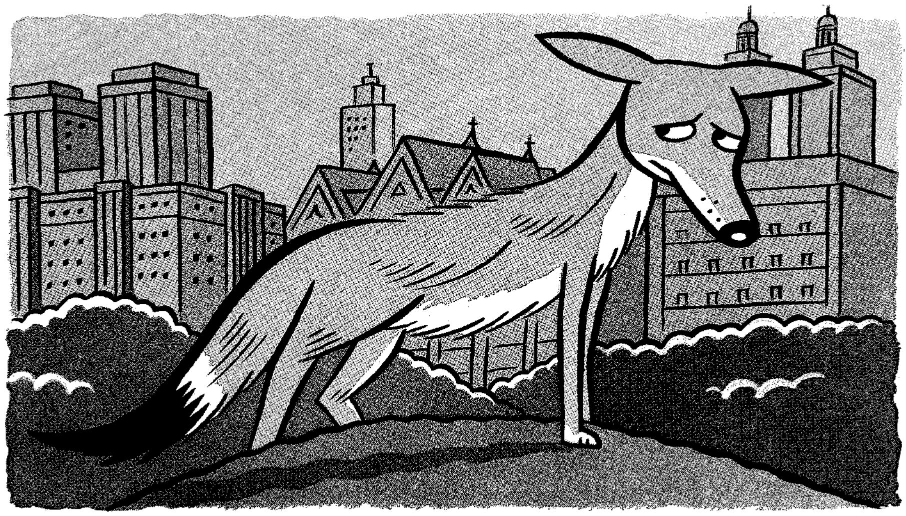


A crafty coyote . . . led the law on a two-day chase through Central Park before he was brought down yesterday by a sharpshooter with a tranquilizer gun. . . . The coyote [was] nicknamed Hal because he was spotted near the Hallett Nature Sanctuary. . . . "This is New York, and I would suggest that the coyote may have had more problems than the rest of us," Mayor Bloomberg said. —*The News, March 23rd.*

Nobody knows how Hal got into Central Park. But he wasn't the first. A coyote was found there in 1999. . . . Otis, the coyote captured in Central Park in 1999, was brought to the Queens Zoo where he still lives.
—*The News, March 24th.*

Hal, the crafty Central Park coyote, mysteriously died Thursday night—just as he was set to return to the wild, officials said. . . . The young coyote . . . stopped breathing as his ears were being tagged at a Putnam County forest. . . . "It's one of the saddest and hardest things we have had to deal with as wildlife rehabilitators," said Rebecca Asman, a city cop who took Hal in after his capture. "Hopefully something can be learned from this so there can be better outcomes for this very misunderstood animal."
—*The News, April 1st.*

If you're really interested in hearing all this, you probably first want to know where I was whelped, and what my parents' dumb burrow was like, and how they started me out hunting field mice, and all the "Call of the Wild" kind of crap, but I'd really rather not go into it, if that's all right with you. It's not that I don't have the time, residing here in Queens and all, where I can rest up conveniently, and not be a hazard to the joggers and the ducks and so on. In Queens I really have quite a free schedule, between feedings, and pacing back and forth, which I don't really have to do but I do it anyway, because the little kids seem to enjoy it, and I feel it is expected of me. One so-called biographical fact I will mention, just because I find the whole business so damn aggravating, is that before I was here I did not have a name—not Otis, not anything—and I wish I didn't have one now. It's really not coyote-like. To have a name at all, that is, let alone Otis. I guess you'd probably have to be a coyote to know what I mean.

The thing I want to tell you about isn't my poor deprived growing up or anything like that, but a bunch of stuff that happened to me a long while ago when I first came to New York City, which you may have heard a little bit about if you were the kind of person who was reading the newspapers around then. What made me think of it was, recently I was at my water dish, and I saw this crazy picture that looked sort of like me, on the newspaper lining this stupid wire-mesh floor of the cage under the dish, I mean. That picture was almost like I was looking in a goddam mirror, I swear to God. Right on the front page was this coyote, who could even be my own dumb little brother for all I know, standing on some rocks, and you can see some water next to him, some grass and whatnot growing alongside, and he's looking straight up at the photographer with this particular expression in his eyes—not a dopey expression, but sort of the opposite of dopey, you might say. Like what he's *looking* at is dopey; it's hard to describe. And, as he's looking, the coyote is licking his nose with his tongue. The tongue kind of curls up over his nose, and you can tell he's about to start down the right side of his muzzle, and lick there, too. I couldn't believe it when I noticed that. I've done that myself only about a couple of hundred thousand times. It's a habit I have.

Probably he's just taken a drink of the water he's standing next to, in the picture, I mean. That's the reason he's licking his nose. After you drink, you'll find there's almost always a few drops of water hanging from the end of your nose, which can be rather irritating, believe me. And in the meantime this photographer starts to snap, from a goddam tree limb maybe even hanging by his heels or something, probably all red in the face after running full speed for about eighty miles trying to find the coyote, photo equipment and straps and all hanging down and dangling everywhere from the tree while the camera is making these very upsetting *snap snap snap snap snap* sounds. This variety of sound also happens to be very terrifying to ducks, by the way.

You see, I can tell, from my own personal experience, almost exactly where the coyote is standing. It's in the Park by the pond where they have an absolutely enormous amount of ducks. That happens to be just about my favorite place in the whole city, it really is. Not many people are aware that New York has a great number of very fat and slow ducks that just sort of go gobbling along enjoying themselves right near the shoreline, not far away out in the middle where a bunch of swimming would be required. And then this photographer comes along snapping photos and cracking tree limbs and causing pieces of bark to fall in the water, scaring the ducks away.

But that's not exactly the stuff I started to tell you about, though—I mean the

SETH

stuff that happened to me a few years back, that I mentioned before. In my case, with the particular events involving myself and ducks and so on, my problems, if you want to call them that, started when I got kind of turned around geographically—I've always had the crappiest sense of direction, it's a terrible flaw for someone in my occupation. Suddenly I was about halfway lost and running all over on extremely hard ground with cars and buildings and all that, never even a bush where I could crawl in and take a breather, and sometimes people were shouting at me. Then high up in the air I saw a couple of ducks, a welcome sight, not that these were the fattest or the closest ducks in the world, you understand, but still it kind of improved my mood just seeing them there.

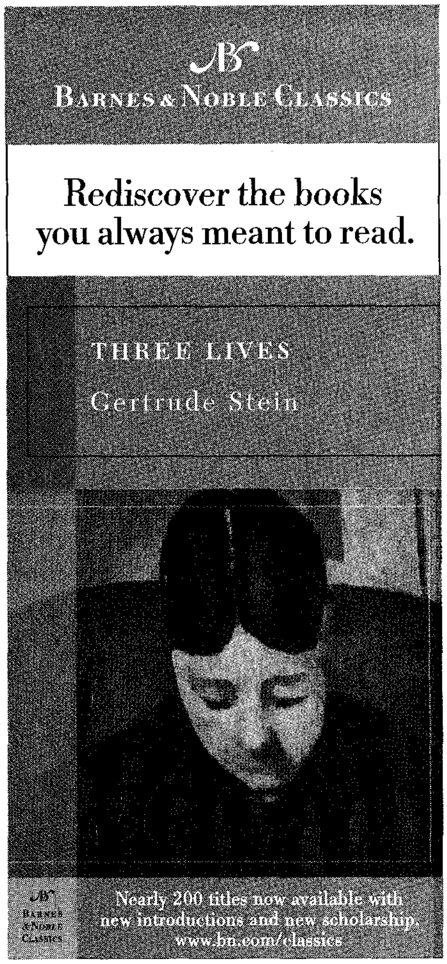
The thing about ducks flying in the air is, they can't stay there forever—they have to come down. As a coyote you learn this fact pretty early on, trust me. And, when they do come down, ninety-nine per cent of the time it's a pond or lake-type area, and, if you're lucky, fairly near the bank, as I pointed out before. So I kept an eye on the general direction these ducks seemed to be going, and I went that way myself, with a lot more running, and being shouted at, and some dodging around cars that I really could have done without, quite frankly. Then I saw a lot of trees, and a stone wall that I kind of leaped over, and then I was in the Park, where it's much more relaxing, if you tend to be excitable, which I sometimes am.

Pretty soon I saw some water up ahead, and I could tell it was a pond, and, sure enough, ducks were on it. I don't know if it was the same ducks I saw flying earlier, but it could have been. I don't know that much about the individual ducks, to be perfectly honest, because they all kind of blend together for me. Really, I have never seen such an incredible bonanza of ducks as were in that pond, and even geese and a few goofy swans with those long necks and whatnot, like a coyote's crazy dream. Right away I decided this was my favorite place ever, as I mentioned previously. I kind of strolled over to it in a quiet way, around on the other side of the rocks, so as not to get them all flustered and unhappy. I sat back in the rocks and bushes and enjoyed the scenery and finally let my heart go back to a more normal rate of speed for a change.

But if you're really partial to ducks, like I am, you want to do more than just watch them, so pretty soon I began creeping up using this special method that I have, with my knees bent and my stomach practically brushing the ground. It looks kind of strange, but it's effective as hell. The only drawback when I do that is sometimes I forget about my tail, and the stupid thing won't stay down. That's something I know I have to work on, I really do. Anyway, I must've forgotten, and my tail must've gone up, and someone must've seen it. All at once there was yelling, and people pointing, so I quickly decided to go for a kind of unobtrusive stroll someplace far away. But then I noticed a car was following me, and another car, and another, and then goddam helicopters if you can believe it, and there were people on one side of me, and when I turned there were more over there. Well, I won't exhaust you with all the stupid details. I think they probably shot me with one of those tranquillizer-dart jobs. I had a hell of a headache afterwards, I can tell you that.

I'd like to meet that other coyote, the one whose picture I saw, and tell him I really sympathize with what he's dealing with at the duck pond. Not to get all sappy or anything, but my heart kind of goes out to the poor slob. I feel like if I could give him any helpful advice, which I probably can't ever do because there's no chance I'd ever actually meet up with him or anything—but, if I did, I'd tell him to stay as far from the ducks as he possibly can. I know it goes against common sense, but these people here don't want coyotes near the ducks at all. It's not like anybody would miss one or two of them, they have so many. Maybe these people have a duck fetish or something. Maybe it's a whole city full of goddam duck-worshippers—don't ask me. Anyway, just take my word for it, leaving their precious goddam ducks alone is definitely the best policy.

What the hell, I'll even go farther than that and say, Don't go anywhere near the whole dumb city at all if you can help it, is my advice, but that's my completely frank opinion, so help me God. Maybe I'm an animal with certain problems and all, like they say, but I still think I've learned some halfway brilliant things in my life. If I weren't sort of temporarily stuck here, I'd love to tell him all this junk, and help him out. ♦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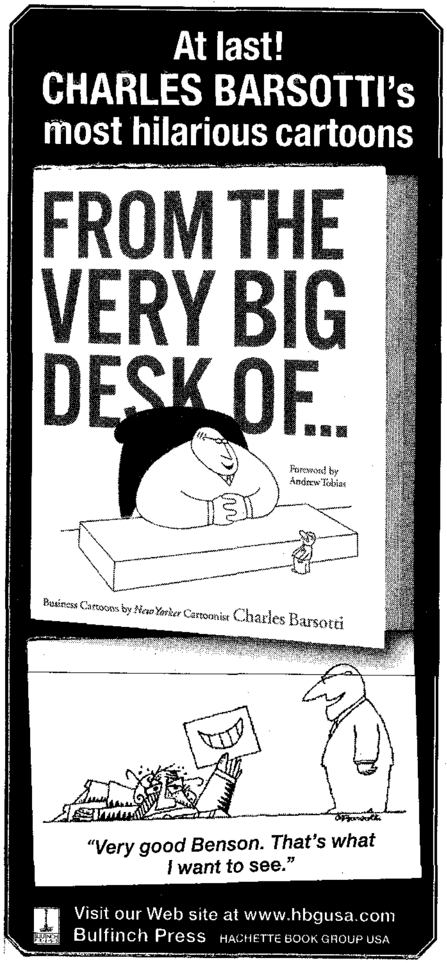

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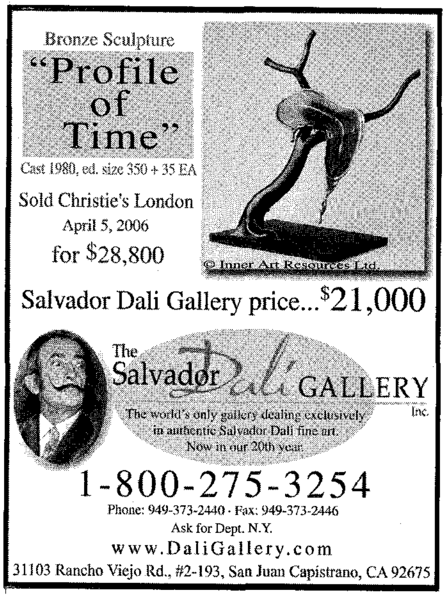

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LETTER FROM ST. PETERSBURG

THE ICE RENAISSANCE

Empress Anna's frozen palace revisited.

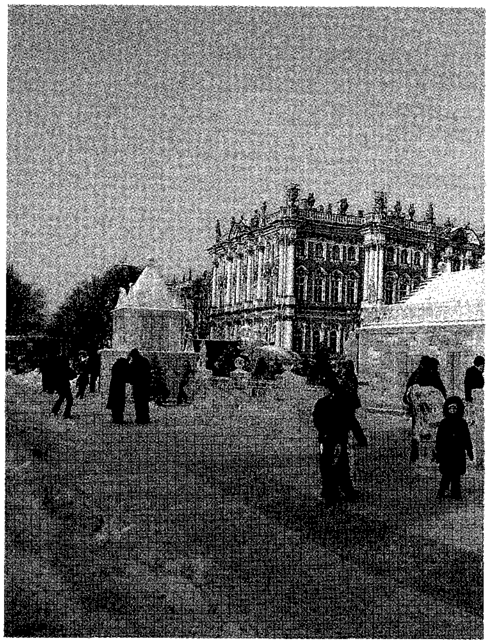
BY ELIF BATUMAN

St. Petersburg was a bog on the Gulf of Finland until, in 1703, Peter the Great decided to transform it into an imperial capital, and conscripted more than seven hundred thousand Russian subjects to clear the forests, level the hills, drain the swamps, and dig canals. The city's emblem is the Bronze Horseman, an eerie statue of Peter astride a rearing steed, apparently about to leap off a cliff and into the Neva. A century after Peter's death, the statue inspired Alexander Pushkin's "The Bronze Horseman," a poem that dramatizes the great flood of 1824 as the revenge of "the elements" against the Tsar and his city. That's the myth of St. Petersburg in a nutshell: Peter, the Bronze Horseman, and Pushkin's poem.

But in 1740 Peter's niece Anna commissioned a sculpture that was bigger, stranger, and more terrifying than the Bronze Horseman: a fully furnished palace made entirely of ice. Igloos had existed for centuries, but Anna's palace was the world's first piece of purely aesthetic ice architecture. Just as the Bronze Horseman catalyzed a celebrated poem by Pushkin, so Anna's monstrous monument fuelled its own literary work: "The House of Ice," a novel by Pushkin's contemporary Ivan Lazhechnikov. "The House of Ice," which enjoyed widespread popularity upon its publication, in 1835, is a cloak-and-dagger romance in which the ice palace serves as the hub of a vast political conspiracy linking various historical and fictional personages, including a diminutive black secretary who reads aloud from his translation of Machiavelli.

This year, a local company, the Ice Studio, built a five-hundred-ton, hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar replica of Anna's palace in downtown Petersburg. The aim, the company's directors said, was to remind the world that "Petersburg is the birthplace of ice sculpture." The Ice Studio, which is privately run, was backed by several corporate sponsors, and the project was publicized by White Days, a program initiated by six luxury hotels in order to boost tourism in the winter off-season.

The replica was constructed according to the "Description and Exact Representation of the House of Ice," published in 1741 by the German-born physicist Georg Wolffgang Krafft, of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Krafft designed some components of the original palace, including several cannons made of ice—loaded with real gunpowder, they fired ice cannonballs a distance of sixty paces—and a sculpted Persian soldier mounted on a giant hollow ice elephant. Connected by pipes to the Admiralty Canal, the elephant had a trunk that spouted water twenty-four feet in the air; at night the water was replaced by flaming oil. The elephant could trumpet just like a real one, by means of a man sitting inside, blowing into a pipe.



Twenty sculptors spent three weeks cutting blocks

ALEXANDER POMPEEV

The palace, designed by the Italian-trained Russian architect Peter Eropkin, was erected directly on the frozen Neva. Blocks of ice, "cemented" with water, immediately fused together, so that the finished structure—nine hundred and eighty square feet in area and twenty-one feet tall—appeared to be cut from a single piece of transparent bluish stone.

With the exception of a few real playing cards frozen to an ice table, everything in the palace was ice. The doorframes and window frames had been dyed to resemble green marble. There was a dressing table with an ice "mirror" and a canopy bed with pillows, blankets, slippers, and nightcaps. On shelves and tables were cups, saucers, plates, cutlery, wineglasses, and figurines; several pocket watches and table clocks had visible mechanisms: cogs and gears cut from ice. At night, ice candles in ice candlesticks and ice logs in an ice fireplace were doused with oil and illuminated. They flared briefly, but didn't melt. Next to the palace, a tiny log cabin made of ice housed a working Russian bathhouse.

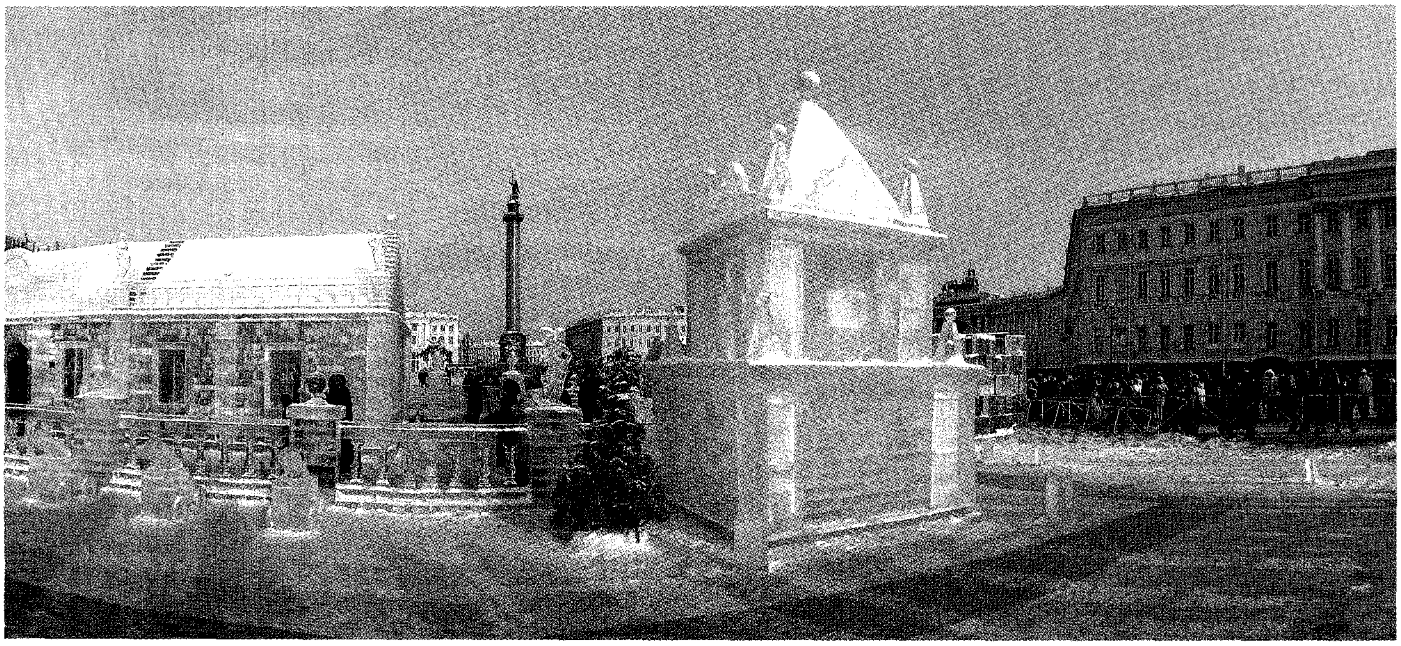
Today, Empress Anna Ioannovna is remembered primarily for her love of jesters, dwarfs, and Germans. In 1710, at the age of seventeen, she was married to Duke Friedrich Wilhelm, the German ruler of Courland, a small duchy situated between two of Russia's rivals, Poland and Prussia. (Peter the Great had arranged the marriage in order to secure a Russian presence there.) The historian Evgeny Anisimov, in his definitive biography of Empress Anna, describes the wedding banquet, during which Peter cut open two pies with his dagger. A splendidly dressed dwarf jumped out of each pie and together they danced a minuet on the table. The next day, the Tsar treated his guests to a second wedding, that of his favorite dwarf. The banquet was attended by forty-two dwarfs from all corners of the empire. Some foreign guests saw a certain symmetry in the double wedding: one between two miniature people and the other between two pawns in the great game of European politics.

On the way to Courland, the teenage Duke died, of alcohol poisoning: on his last night in Petersburg, he had engaged—rashly, one feels—in a drinking contest with Peter the Great. To the dismay of Anna and her in-laws, Peter forbade the young widow from returning to Russia, lest her departure disturb the European balance of power. In more than three hundred letters addressed to her family, Anna repeatedly expressed her wish to remarry, but, for political reasons, her uncle rejected all of her potential suitors.

Peter died in 1725, and his fourteen-year-old grandson and successor, Peter II, died in 1730. To her surprise, Anna Ioannovna, now thirty-seven, became empress. She returned to Russia that February, accompanied by her longtime lover, Duke Ernst Johann Biron. The new Empress cut an imposing figure. "When she walked among the cavaliers," one courtier recalled, "she was a head taller than them all, and was extraordinarily fat." She and Biron were inseparable, and dined together nearly every day, usually in the company of Biron's wife and three children. Anna's reign came to be known as Bironovshchina: the era of Biron.

Anna loved to be entertained. As a child, she had been impressed by the volubility of her mother's friends, and now she ordered her chamberlain to track them down in their homes and bring them to court. For those no longer living, or too old to travel, replacements were sought. "Send me someone who looks like Tatiana Novokreshchenova," she instructed. "She should be about forty years old, and should be talkative, like Novokreshchenova was." One courtier wrote of her first meeting with Anna, "She seized me by the shoulder so hard that I was in pain . . . and asked: 'How fat am I? Am I as fat as Avdotya Ivanovna?' "—a countess known for her repertoire of gossipy anecdotes. The terrified courtier replied, "It is impossible to compare Your Majesty with her, she is twice as fat." Pleased with this answer, Anna ordered her new friend, "Speak!," and made her talk for several hours.

Unlike other Russian rulers, Anna



ce. They replicated all the original components, including the bathhouse, except for the fire-spewing elephant.

rarely used borzois or falcons for hunting, and was relatively uninterested in the strategy and the tactics of the chase. But she was an expert markswoman, and in two months at Peterhof, her summer estate, she shot sixty-eight wild ducks from her window. Often, an army of beaters would drive the animals from the nearby forest into a clearing, and Anna would pull up in a special carriage and shoot them all. Anisimov mentions that she might have had an "Amazon complex."

Anna's favorite form of entertainment, however, was to arrange and rearrange marriages, and it was this penchant that gave rise to the House of Ice. The winter of 1740 was the coldest in decades: barometers shattered, brandy froze indoors, birds fell from the sky like stones. That winter, one of Anna's servants, a middle-aged, hunchbacked Kalmyk woman known as Buzheninova, after the dish *buzhenina* (cold roast pork), confided to Anna, "Without a husband, my life is like a hard frost." The Empress was struck by the notion of marrying Buzheninova to one of her six jesters, Prince Mikhail Golitsyn, who had been convicted of apostasy for marrying an Italian commoner and converting from Russian Orthodoxy to Catholicism. Anna had commuted his sentence and dubbed him Prince Kvasnik, the imperial cupbearer of *kvas* (a beerlike beverage made from rye or barley). Kvasnik's other official duties included sitting on a nest of eggs in a reception room while clucking like a chicken.

Anna's chamberlain was the one to suggest that the wedding festivities take place in a palace made of ice. Then Biron's archrival, a charismatic cabinet minister named Artemy Volynsky—the protagonist of Ivan Lazhechnikov's novel—organized a mass holiday in honor of Anna's birthday and name day, the anniversary of her accession to the throne, Shrovetide week, and the ratification of the Treaty of Belgrade, between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. The wedding of a Kalmyk and a Catholic convert was to represent Russia's "total victory over all infidels." The whole celebration would culminate at the House of Ice.

The couple made their entrance in an iron cage on the back of a real elephant, followed by a three-hundred-person "ethnographic parade" of "bridal couples." Lazhechnikov describes the parade—which he claims that his grandmother witnessed—in "The House of Ice": Ostyaks riding on deer were "followed by Novgorodians on a pair of goats, Ukrainians on bulls, Petersburg Finns on donkeys, a Tatar with his Tataress, mounted on well-fed pigs, to demonstrate the conquering of both nature and custom. Then there were red-haired Finns on miniature horses, Kamchadals riding dogs, Kalmyks on camels," as well as Belorussians and Jaroslavians.

Kvasnik and Buzheninova were transferred from their cage to the House of Ice, where armed sentries forced them to remain until the next morning. They spent several hours running around, dancing, and, in Lazhechnikov's rendering, turning somersaults, beating each other, banging on the walls, and breaking all that could be broken. Finally, they collapsed on the ice bed, where they were found the next morning, close to death.

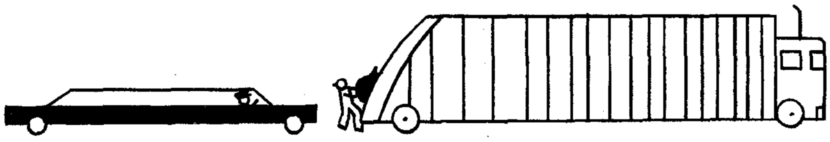
After the festival, Volynsky remained in the Empress's good graces for a short time—until his valet turned over some compromising papers to Biron, and he was convicted of treason. In June, Volynsky's tongue and hand were cut off, and he was beheaded, as was the architect Eropkin. In October, at the age of forty-seven, Anna died, of kidney failure. In November, the Biron family was banished to Siberia. As for the House of Ice, it had melted in March—all except some large pieces of the walls, which were used for refrigeration in the imperial palace.

With the arrival of spring in 1740, the short-lived tradition of ice architecture more or less disappeared from Russia. In the nineteenth century, ice castles were built in Siberia, but the really spectacular work was being done elsewhere: North America, Finland, Japan, China. It wasn't until Boris Yeltsin, originally a construction foreman in the Ural city of Sverdlovsk, came to Moscow, in the nineteen-eighties, that the Russian ice renaissance began. The first all-Russian ice festival took place on Yeltsin's initiative, in Moscow in 1986.

The directors of the Ice Studio, Valery Gromov, a former Navy officer, and Svetlana Mikheyeva, a former doctor, first became interested in ice sculpture in 1999, when they travelled to Japan as part of the Russian Presidential Management Training Initiative, and got stuck in an elevator in Tokyo with one of Yeltsin's appointees—the chairman of the Association of Russian Snow, Ice, and Sand Sculptors. In 2002, they co-directed Petersburg's first International Ice Sculpture Contest. (The Ukrainian team won, with a Trojan horse.) The next year, they founded the Ice Studio. In the summer, the Ice Studio builds sand sculptures; last June, two of the House of Ice sculptors collaborated on a twenty-foot sand Gulliver in Komarovo.

Gromov and Mikheyeva had long dreamed of reconstructing Anna Ioannovna's palace. They planned to hold weddings in their House of Ice: for the equivalent of around four hundred dollars, couples could marry there; for around four thousand they could spend their wedding night in the ice bed. City officials approved the proposal last November. In January, workers cut five hundred tons of ice from several nearby lakes and transported it to Palace Square, between the Admiralty Fortress and the Winter Palace. Twenty sculptors from Petersburg, Archangelsk, and Vologda spent three weeks cutting blocks of ice with chain saws, fusing them with water, spinning balustrades on electric lathes, smoothing the walls with clothes irons, and hand-carving the sculptures. They replicated all of the components in Krafft's description, including the bathhouse, but they replaced the fire-spewing elephant with an elephant-shaped slide.

The House of Ice opened in early February, not without controversy. Mikheyeva had wanted to hold weddings there on Valentine's Day, which commemorates a Catholic saint. The editor of the newspaper *Orthodox St. Petersburg* said that the Ice Studio was "trying to ridicule the Holy Mystery of matrimony, not in a church of God but in a transitory jester's palace"; he characterized the entire tradition of "jesters' weddings" as a "conscious mockery of

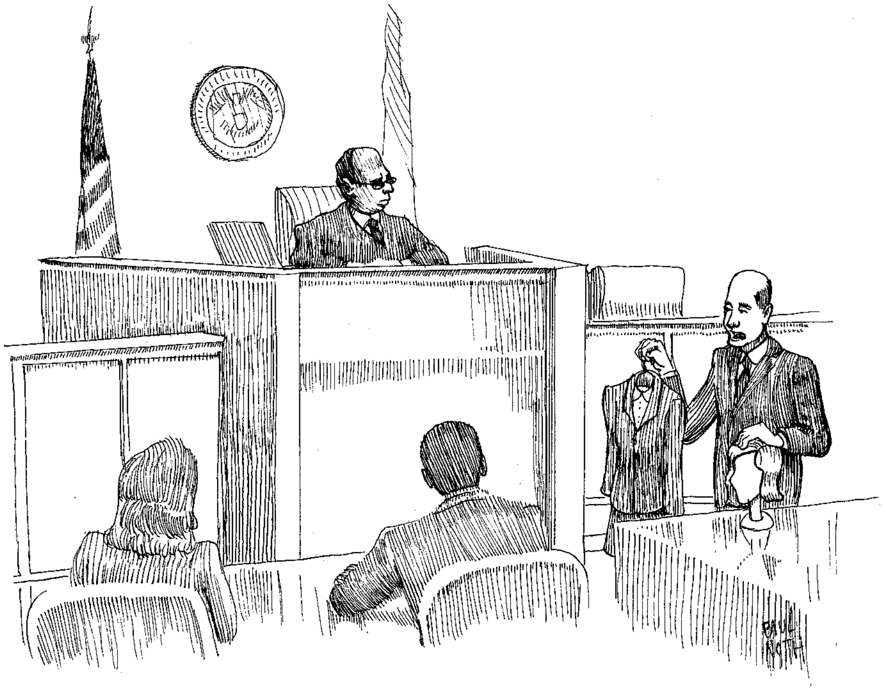


the Holy Church" devised by "the Protestant Peter I." (Peter admired Protestant thought but wasn't actually a Protestant; Slavophiles sometimes call him one as an insult.) For once, Petersburg's political left was aligned with the Orthodox Church. In January, the liberal newspaper *Arguments and Facts* ran an article suggesting new "contenders" for the title "House of Ice": notably, 48 Kondratevsky Prospekt, where the contents of a frozen sewer pipe had surfaced in the kitchen sink. "If you don't have running water," the authors wrote, "you can bathe in the bathhouse made of ice."

Matters were further complicated by the coincidence of the scheduled opening with the name day of St. Xenia of Petersburg. Believed to have been born in 1730, Xenia was widowed at twenty-six, went mad from grief, gave all her belongings to the poor, wore her husband's clothes, surrendered her own name and called herself Andrei Fyodorovich, after her husband, and was known as a holy fool. It is hard to imagine a trickier saint for Anna Ioannovna to come up against. One young widow renounces worldly things and becomes the patron saint of marriage; the other entertains all of Europe with her extravagant matrimonial farces.

In response to their critics, Gromov and Mikheyeva postponed the opening ceremony by two days, and never operated the bathhouse. On Valentine's Day, five couples held wedding parties and five more celebrated wedding anniversaries in the House of Ice—but the actual weddings took place off-site. News broadcasts showed soldiers in period dress igniting fireworks in the ice cannons; a middle-aged woman in a silver gown and tiara wandered around, accompanied by a Samoyed dog.

Despite the bitter cold and a high admission fee—a hundred and fifty rubles, or five dollars—visitors waited in kilometre-long lines. Three rows of protective fences were eventually put up to minimize damage to the building. Gromov and Mikheyeva waived the admission fee on Monday and Tuesday mornings for orphans, pensioners, veterans, and *blokadniks* (survivors of the nine-hundred-day blockade of Leningrad during the Second World War). Pensioners turned out in alarming numbers. "On the first Monday, there was a three-hour line," Mikheyeva recalled. "Grandmothers and grandfathers were sliding down the slide. We were terrified."



"If it please the court, I'd like to act as my own plucky young female attorney."

• •

In early March, I met Gromov, a squarish man with a military bearing, and Mikheyeva, who wore a pink fur collar and looked at once weary, stern, and faintly amused. In their office trailer in Palace Square, photocopies of Krafft's engravings were taped to the wall. The electric generator was broken, leaving the office unheated, and everyone was wearing a heavy coat. Gromov and I went outside to look at the palace. Pale, translucent, spectral, it resembled the ghost of a municipal building. Pilasters alternated with large windows; statues on a balustrade encircled the roof. Inside, all the walls and furnishings were either transparent or, where the surface of the ice had melted and refrozen, a milky blue. The only exceptions were, in the first room, three playing cards and a copy of the St. Petersburg phone book, encased in ice. (The publisher was a corporate sponsor.) The contents of the second room, Gromov explained, had been "improvised on a matrimonial theme," since Krafft hadn't provided a drawing. What appeared to be a Renaissance marble angel had been sculpted from snow, as had two albatross-size songbirds perched atop two hearts. In the corner hulked a massive snow wedding cake, and staring impassively at the cake was a life-size, bluish Anna Ioannovna, shimmering in her throne like some kind of hologram. In a third room was the amazing bed, its canopy resembling a frozen waterfall. A pair of ice slippers lay on an ice cushion on the floor. I sat briefly on the bed. It was, as expected, hard and cold. I found myself remembering Lazhechnikov's description: "Can this be Hymen's altar? Wherever they sat, whatever they touched—everything was made from ice."

Lazhechnikov, however, was not a major source of inspiration for the Ice Studio. "We take a very critical view of him," Gromov said. "His book is a work of art, not history. All these things really happened. Only not with dwarfs; with real people." Gromov was alluding to a popular misconception that Kvasnik and Buzheninova were themselves dwarfs. Evidently, the ice palace has gone down in history as a kind of doll house for the Amazonian Anna's human toys. The editor of the magazine *Hermitage* characterized the building itself as an architectural dwarf. "It's not a palace, or even a house—it's a little houseling," she said. "The real palace is next door: the Winter Palace."

Back in Palace Square, I paused in front of the slide. Determined-looking children climbed the staircase built into the elephant's back, sat approximately where the Persian soldier used to sit, and slid down. Could there be a better mascot than this elephant for the persistence and mutability of cultural memory?

Why hold the jesters' wedding in a House of Ice? Nobody really knows. Lazhechnikov imagined a scene in which Biron's henchmen torture a Ukrainian informer by pouring water on his head during a severe frost. The resulting "human ice statue" catches the eye of Anna Ioannovna, who announces, "This gives me the idea of building a palace out of ice." Foucault would have been pleased: the palace in its very conception was a punishment.

In fact, the ice palace had no clear purpose, and thus many unclear purposes. It was a torture device, a science experiment, an ethnographic museum, a work of art. It was a haunted house, a fairy tale—Snow White in her glass coffin, surrounded by dwarfs. It was a suspended disaster, a flood waiting to happen—like the Petersburg of Pushkin's "Bronze Horseman." The ice palace represents the prison house of marriage, the vanity of human endeavor, the dialectic of empire and subject. As Gregory Freidin, a professor of Russian literature at Stanford, put it, "The House of Ice is to Russia what the refrigerator is to the Eskimos—only more so. It's an objectification of their objective condition."

Hopelessly overdetermined, like an object in a dream, the House of Ice appears in poems about dreams. It is believed to have inspired the "sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice" in Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." Thomas Moore, the nineteenth-century poet-satirist, wrote of a dream ball in the House of Ice, hosted by Tsar Alexander I and attended by the entire Holy Alliance. When the castle and its occupants start to melt, "some word, like 'Constitution'—long / Congealed in frosty silence," drips from the tongue of Prussia's king. Luba Golburt, a literary historian, has compared the House of Ice to Pompeii: a petrified historical tableau, "unfrozen" by nineteenth-century Romantics.

One scholar I spoke to compared today's political climate to that of Anna Ioannovna's reign, in its "tyranny of 'entertainments.' " I later asked Evgeny Anisimov, Anna Ioannovna's biographer, how the reconstruction reflected the current Russian state of affairs. Anisimov, though reluctant to compare the present day to Anna's reign, conceded that "the House of Ice could hardly have been built under Yeltsin—either the ice would have been stolen or the funding . . ." He also pointed out that, for the first time, Petersburg has a female governor, Valentina Matviyenko. "In city holidays now, we see more empresses than emperors—this isn't coincidental," he said.

Nor is it coincidental that the palace was built during the Presidency of Vladimir Putin, a Petersburg native. A photograph of Putin appears on the Ice Studio's Web site, with a quotation from a 2002 speech about "employing culture to form a Russian national image." During Petersburg's tercentenary, in 2003, Putin spent nearly a million dollars on airplanes to disperse the rain clouds that imperilled this national image. It was a nature-defying gesture worthy of Peter the Great. In a Pushkinian dénouement, rain poured down undeterred—notably, just when Putin was receiving international heads of state at the Bronze Horseman.

Once the "imperial idea" was back, the ice palace materialized almost as a matter of course. The tercentenary concluded with a summit of the European Union in the former palace of the Romanov grand dukes; its renovation cost the equivalent of three hundred million dollars, and entailed levelling nearly sixty pensioners' gardening sheds. Ducal palace or gardening shed? House of ice or *frozen apartment*? These are not rhetorical questions. In one Web forum, a Petersburg resident complained that the money spent on the ice palace was enough to buy "two apartments for two young families." Another replied, "Two apartments would bring happiness to only two families, but the ice palace brings happiness to tens, even hundreds, of thousands of people, especially to our children."

Anna's ice palace, with its poor human-rights record, might seem an odd source of delight for children. But replacing miserable jesters with happy children is one way to master history. In Vladimir Mayakovsky's futuristic play "The Bedbug," a cryogenized bourgeois is defrosted by an Institute for Human Resurrection, and put in the zoo. Drinking vodka and smoking, the bourgeois is an appalling spectacle; but mankind has a responsibility to transform "the horrors of a bygone age" into a "gay and edifying entertainment." In just such a way, the Ice Studio transformed the House of Ice. No jesters

WELCOME, STOCKHOLDERS
PATTERSON

shivered in their replica; instead, Empress Anna herself was frozen to her chair. "'Twas transient in its nature, as in show / 'Twas durable," William Cowper wrote of the 1740 palace, which he saw as a kind of Renaissance Vanitas. Anna, like all rulers, came and went. Indeed, what was the Cold War, if not a House of Ice? It seemed durable, but it thawed.

Ten thousand tickets were sold to the House of Ice. Mikheyeva and Gromov declined to disclose their profit, stating only that the palace had "paid for itself." They plan to repeat the exercise next year, and are already recruiting "bridal pairs" for an ethnographic pageant: the Danish and Estonian consulates have agreed to send representatives.

Visiting the palace one weekday afternoon, I found it full of Petersburgers. Two were amateur photographers. One, Valery Dunaev, was a *blokadnik;* another, Tamara Malinovskaya, clad in the largest fur coat I had ever seen, was coming for the second time. "I can't tear myself away," she said. A third local, Larisa Gorbacheva, said, "We used to walk around the city and there was nothing to look at. Now we look around with pleasure."

The House of Ice closed on a Friday in mid-March, but the weather was still wintry, and there were rumors that the palace would stay up through the weekend. Sunday morning, I headed to Palace Square one last time, intending to take some photographs. But, when I turned the corner on Nevsky Prospekt, all that remained was a pile of glacial rubble.

"*Zrya! Zrya!*" people were saying—"What a waste!"

A small bearded man in a long overcoat and a fur hat stood next to me, shaking his head.

"When did they tear it down?" I asked him.

"Who knows? Late last night. What a waste. What a shame."

I mentioned the palace's historical origins.

"Of course," the bearded man said. "It's all historical. It's all made from plans, from original documents. There was an empress, you see. I'm not an expert—I forget her name. Alexandra Fyodorovna, something like that. *She* built the palace."

"Why?"

"Well, for a joke! For fun! Tsars had to enjoy themselves, too. And what a beauty it was," he sighed. "There were thousands of people here, such a line, you couldn't get close. They had cannons that shot real cannonballs, and it was all made out of ice. I saw it on television. It's just shameful what they've done. A shame."

"They deceived us," a woman nearby said. She had Asian features and was wearing a snow-white ski suit. "They promised that they would leave the palace standing until tonight. I bring my daughter to Palace Square for her art class every Sunday morning—we came an hour early, just to see it one last time. It's hurtful, even." Her daughter, about seven years old and missing several teeth, had joined some children who were clambering on the ice boulders, resembling, in their padded snowsuits, tiny astronauts.

I thought of Krafft's "Description," where he contemplates the transience of ice, and invites the reader to consider the planet Saturn, where, if water existed, "it would be known only as a sort of hard stone, like marble," and might be used as a building material. "Truly," Krafft wrote, "the House of Ice was, for its rareness and beauty, well worthy of being transported to Saturn and of taking its place among the stars."

The next day, I met Gromov and Mikheyeva in the lobby of the Grand Hotel Europe. They strode through the metal detector with the dynamism of a figure-skating duo. I asked them why they had not left the palace standing through the weekend. They exchanged glances.

"It's complicated," Gromov said.

"We tried to reach you," Mikheyeva said. "We didn't know until the last minute."

When I told her about the disappointed citizens I had seen, Mikheyeva averted her eyes. "We didn't go there the entire day. We knew everyone would be angry at us, so we went to Vyborg."

"Why didn't you just leave it up?" I asked.

"Well, you know, an ice palace is so beautiful at first. Then the sun shines, and it melts, slowly, slowly—it's depressing. We wanted to leave on a positive note."

When I left the hotel, I stopped by Palace Square to visit the heap of ice, but it had already vanished. ♦

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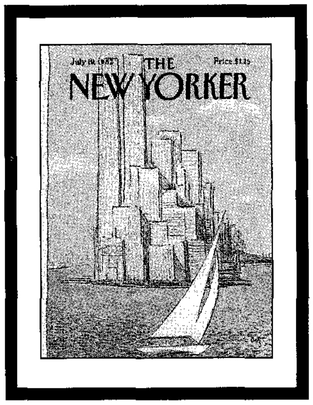

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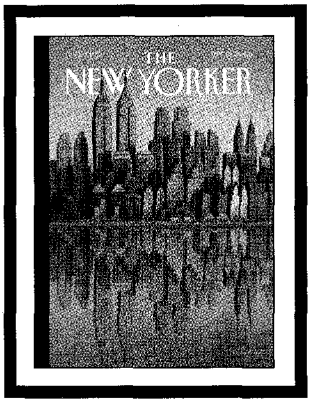

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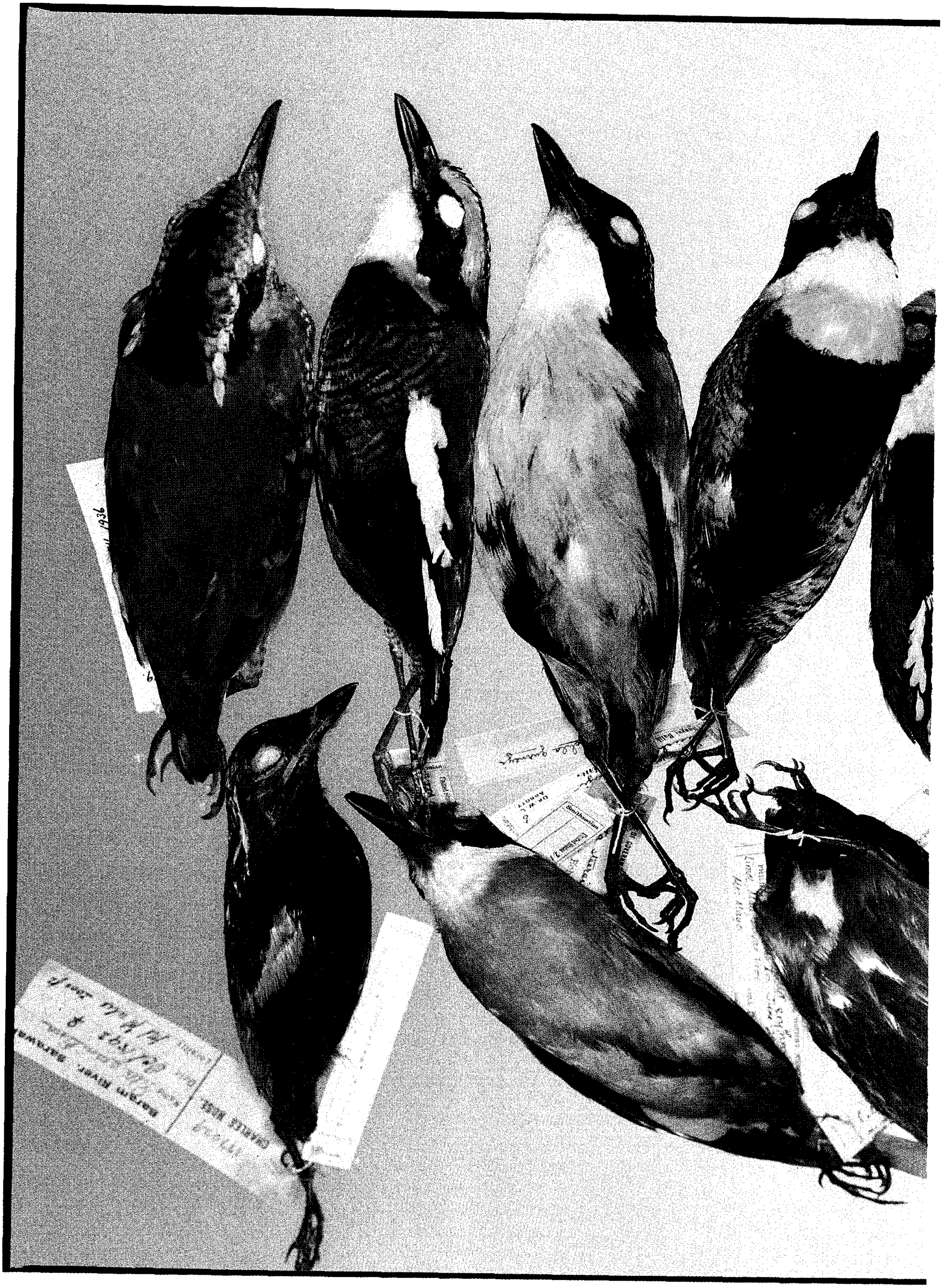
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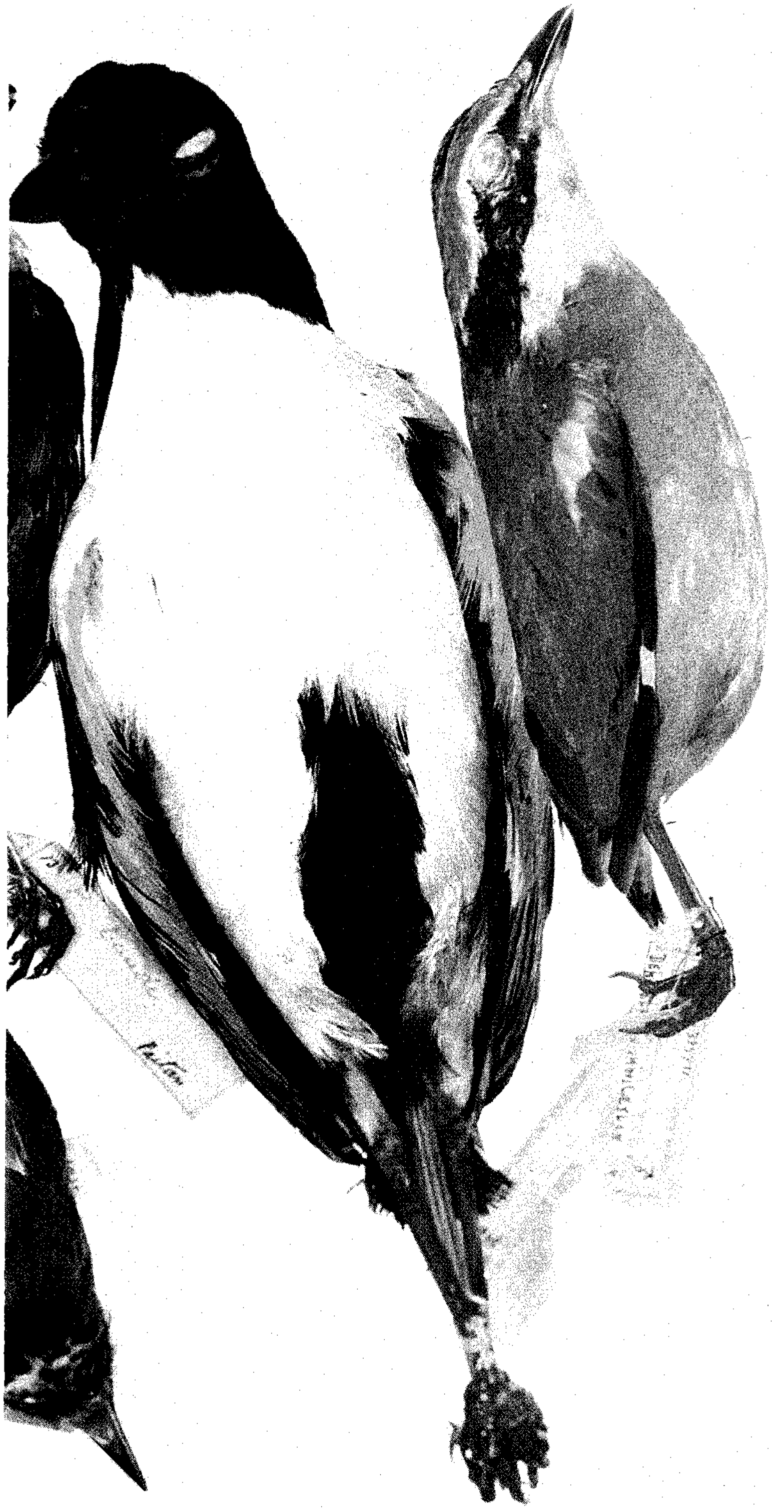


On a wintry evening in January, the Smithsonian threw a book party in the Castle—a turreted folly on the Mall, in Washington, D.C.—to celebrate Pamela Rasmussen's monumental new work, "Birds of South Asia: The Ripley Guide," which had recently been published, in two volumes, by the Smithsonian and Lynx Edicions. The book, illustrated by John Anderton and other artists, puts the highest standards of professional ornithology into a form that an amateur can use in bird-watching, bridging a schism between professional and amateur bird-lovers that has existed for almost a century. Rasmussen examined everything that is known about birds in India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Maldives—she measured, described, and plotted range maps for most of fourteen hundred and forty-one species, serving as sole judge in hundreds of difficult decisions about which birds to include on the final list. Along the way, she negotiated many other obstacles, including the death, in 2001, of S. Dillon Ripley, a grand old man of American ornithology, who was the book's originator and guiding spirit. Most spectacularly, her research helped lead to the unravelling of the greatest ornithological fraud ever committed—a convoluted skein of theft and data falsification that was perpetrated by the late British ornithologist Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen.

At the party, Rasmussen mingled shyly with the clubby, moneyed world that used to dominate natural history, and still lingers in ornithology. David Challinor, Harvard '43, now eighty-five years old and a senior scientist emeritus at the Smithsonian, greeted her by saying, "Marvellous, Pam, marvellous. You stayed with it." Rasmussen smiled and nodded, a bit stiffly. She is keenly aware of the differences between her own upbringing, in Oregon, and that of the East Coast scientist-aristocrats she has come to know at the Smithsonian. Rasmussen is forty-seven years old and stands six feet tall in her

Ornithology has relied on "study skins," but D.N.A.-based research may replace them. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

high heels. She has Nordic features and wide-set pale-blue eyes. She sometimes appears startled when you address her, as though she'd been thinking about something else. As she made her way around the room, colleagues from the Smithsonian praised her extraordinary ability to notice tiny details about bird specimens that other researchers miss, a condition Rasmussen herself diagnoses as "attention-surplus disorder." Bruce Beehler, a former co-worker, said, "Very few younger researchers have Pam's ability to stay focussed on one thing, one specimen, for hours and hours. They need ten things happening at once."

Conversation returned several times during the evening to Colonel Meinertzhagen, who died in 1967. Meinertzhagen enjoyed a formidable reputation in international ornithology. He was a chairman of the British Ornithologists' Club, and the recipient of a Godman-Salvin Medal, one of the highest honors in British birding. His unorthodox methods and surprising finds had been the subject of rumor during his lifetime, but there was never any substantiated accusation of fraud. Three largely adulatory biographies of Meinertzhagen have been published since his death—one by a soldier, one by a professional game hunter, and one by a birder. "Duty, Honor, Empire" (1970), by John Lord, and "Warrior" (1998), by Peter Hathaway Capstick, don't say anything about fraud. Mark Cocker's "Richard Meinertzhagen: Soldier, Scientist and Spy" (1989) does consider many of the rumors, but ultimately rejects them. It wasn't until more than thirty years after his death, when circumstances brought Meinertzhagen to the notice of an unusually attentive researcher, that the extent of his deception was revealed.

One day in 1967, when Rasmussen was eight, her father, Dr. Chester Murray Rasmussen, came into her room, glanced contemptuously at the dolls she and her younger sister, Sally, were playing with, and said, "Why don't you girls get interested in something useful?" Her father was an osteopath, and Pam remembers him as "the biggest man you had ever seen." He spent a lot of time in his basement den, which he had decorated with the heads of animals that he had killed on hunting trips. (A few years later, Dr. Rasmussen deserted the family.) Pam's mother, Helen, a strict Seventh-Day Adventist, let the children know that she disapproved of what he was doing down there. "Sinning," was how Pam understood it.

A couple of days after that encounter, Pam's mother bought her the junior edition of Oliver Austin's "Birds of the World," illustrated by Arthur Singer. Pam had never thought much about birds before, but she quickly became obsessed with the pictures in the book. "I just thought the way the birds looked was so wonderful," she said. She tried to get her sister interested, too. "Pam would open the book and say, 'O.K., which of the birds on this page do you like best?' " Sally told me. "Then she'd do the same thing for the next page—all the way through the book."

After poring over the illustrations, Pam went out to the marsh behind the house, which was situated about twenty miles west of Portland, and recognized a bird—a long-billed marsh wren. "Now that I knew its name, it was thrilling," she said. She had bird-watching birthdays at the Oregon beach, in October. "There we'd be, with Pam, freezing, looking for ducks," Sally, who is now a financial writer, said. For gifts, Rasmussen always wanted bird books. (If it was an expensive book, like the first edition of "Parrots of the World," by Joseph M. Forshaw, it had to cover two or three gift opportunities.) In addition to looking at the pictures, Rasmussen studied the text of these books carefully—except for the chapters entitled "Fossil Birds." Her mother told her not to read those.

At Walla Walla College, an Adventist institution in Washington State where Rasmussen spent six years, earning her master's in biology in 1983, evolution was not taken seriously. "Except," she said, "when we learned what was wrong with

Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen with a great bustard, in Nairobi, in 1915.

COURTESY RANDLE MEINERTZHAGEN/BODLEIAN LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

it." It wasn't until Rasmussen reached the University of Kansas, where she did her dissertation on cormorants in Patagonia, receiving a Ph.D. in 1990, that she studied Darwin in depth. "It wasn't like the scales fell from my eyes," she said. "You don't really need Darwin to be interested in bird diversity, which is what fascinates me. You need him to explain it." Compared to the theory of natural selection, religion came to seem silly, Rasmussen says, although her mother still hopes she will return to the fold.

Rasmussen entered the job market in the early nineties, just as molecular biology was beginning to emerge as a new way of doing avian systematics—the naming, description, and classification of birds. Morphology (the study of form and structure) was being superseded by molecular genetics, but Rasmussen wanted to study birds, not bird code. Owing in part to the peculiarly pre-Darwinian circumstances of her education, she wanted a job that would let her do what the nineteenth-century ornithologists had done: travel widely, observe and collect birds, and work with specimens in museums. In 1992, Rasmussen found that job, as the assistant to S. Dillon Ripley, the former secretary of the Smithsonian. Ripley's maternal great-grandfather, Sidney Dillon, had been the chairman of the Union Pacific Railroad, and young Dillon cultivated his interest in birds on the family's estate, in Litchfield, Connecticut. When he was a young man, he made several expeditions to India, in the grand style, meeting dignitaries while collecting birds. As a professional ornithologist, he wrote a ten-volume tome on the birds of India with the renowned Indian ornithologist Salim Ali. The Indian subcontinent, because of its turbulent political history and localized record keeping, was one of the last regions on earth where the avifauna was still not fully catalogued. Now, as his final project, Ripley wanted to produce a field guide that would be the last word on the subject.

In determining which birds to include on the final species list, Ripley was strongly predisposed in favor of museum specimens, and against photographs and eyewitness accounts, which would be allowed only if the evidence was what he deemed "diagnostic"—clear images, accompanied, if possible, by recorded birdsong. For Rasmussen, this meant examining tens of thousands of the two hundred and thirty thousand specimens from the region, which are scattered around museums in the United States, Great Britain, and India, as well as in Paris and Berlin. There would also be lots of field work to do. "The job seemed like it was too good to be true," she told me. Not long after the project started, Ripley became too ill to continue working, and Rasmussen took over.

Like all branches of natural history, the traditional science of ornithology is based on specimen collections. The taxonomy of birds (the naming of species and subspecies) and their phylogeny (the ordering of species into ancestral families) were done using so-called "study skins." With the recent advent of DNA-based research, scientists are now revising this scheme, working on a grand new system of classification, called "genetic phylogeny," which will reflect the new information gathered from DNA. What role specimens will play in the new molecular world is unclear, and some researchers, Rasmussen among them, fear that, once DNA has been harvested from old specimens, future generations of ornithologists will see the skins as mere curiosities, artifacts of an earlier age.

Study skins differ from the mounted exhibits one sees in museums. Mounting birds, often in natural poses, is a good way to express what birders call the "jizz"—the bird's wild essence. But mounted birds are difficult to measure precisely, and minute variations in size are crucial in making taxonomic distinctions. In a study skin, the soft parts of the bird—brain and organs—have been removed, without disturbing the shape, so that the specimen resembles a dead bird in hand. If the skin has been skillfully dressed in the field, the feathers remain attached. The three largest collections are in London, New York, and Washington; among them, the natural-history museums in these cities have almost three million skins. Most were gathered in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, before bird science developed professional degrees and standards. Collectors were often wealthy gentlemen who pursued ornithology as a hobby. Sometimes a museum would sponsor their birding expeditions to far-flung places, and in return the collectors would promise to contribute their skins to the museum. More sedentary collectors could also acquire skins from natural-history dealers, such as Maison Verreaux, in Paris, or John Bell's shop, on Worth Street and Broadway in Manhattan, where as a young man Teddy Roosevelt bought specimens. Another popular source was the "plume hunters" who worked for the millinery industry, finding birds to provide feathers for ladies' hats. One of the most successful plume hunters of the nineteenth century, Joseph H. Batty, was also a collector for the American Museum of Natural History.

The Age of Collection waned in the twentieth century, mainly as a result of the growing popularity of the conservation movement. In his history of American ornithology, "A Passion for Birds," Mark V. Barrow, Jr., explains that around the time the passenger pigeon, a once common North American bird, became extinct (the last one died in 1914, in the Cincinnati Zoo), the public began to grow aware of the possibility of species extinction, and of the need to preserve birds in the wild. The nature writer John Burroughs called skin and egg collectors "men who plunder nests and murder their owners" and suggested that the "skin-collector should be put down, either by legislation or with dogs." He also called museum-based ornithologists "not only the enemy of birds, but the enemy of all who would know them rightly." Out of these sentiments grew modern birding, a phenomenally popular outdoor recreational activity (today, forty-six million Americans call themselves birders) in which many collect not skins but "sight records"—eyewitness accounts, supported when possible by sound recordings and photographs.

Scientists regarded sight records as unreliable ("I wouldn't have seen it if I hadn't believed it" is how ornithologists refer to some birders' eyewitness accounts) and held fast to the principle that specimens were the ultimate standard in ornithology. (A recent example of skepticism about sight records is the controversy over the ivory-billed woodpecker, an extremely rare species that several birders claim to have observed and recorded in the southeastern United States, but which other ornithologists continue to maintain is extinct.) However, the ethics of conservation gradually won out over the interests of science, and legislation was passed in many countries that made collecting more and more difficult. This forced the scientists into a complex and paradoxical relationship with amateurs. On the one hand, they were at pains to distinguish themselves, as professionals, from the birders, whose standards they generally deplored. But, on the other hand, because they were often unable to work with fresh specimens, the scientists had to rely more than ever on the skins amassed by the old amateurs. But who were they? What were their standards, these gentlemen scientists who did the early collecting and classifying?

Richard Meinertzhagen was one of the greatest of the old amateur collectors. His collection of twenty-five thousand skins, most of which he shot himself, was acquired by Britain's Natural History Museum in 1954—one of the largest private collections garnered by that museum in the twentieth century. In an obituary, the *Times* of London said that Meinertzhagen "will be remembered as an eminent and outspoken ornithologist of international fame and as one of the best and most colorful intelligence officers the Army ever had." The list of his military accomplishments would have been familiar to many readers: if not exactly a historic figure, he had been witness to a lot of history, especially in British East Africa and Palestine, where he served with T. E. Lawrence during the First World War. In later life, he made his reputation as the ultimate ornithologist, a sort of birding superhero. He could get to the remotest part of Afghanistan, find a bird no one had ever seen there before, shoot it, and prepare the skin in the field. (Toward the end of his collecting career, he managed to get around restrictions on killing birds by carrying a small gun concealed inside a walking stick.) Meinertzhagen always had beautiful skins, which is one reason that his collection was so valuable to scientists.

Rasmussen had never heard of Meinertzhagen when she began the Ripley Guide, but she soon came to recognize his name on many important specimens from the region. He was the sole authority for fourteen species and subspecies on the subcontinent. Like other noted British collectors who were posted to remote corners of the Empire, he had shot and skinned and classified birds as a break from colonizing. (Another major collector in the region, Louis Mandelli, had been a tea-plantation manager in Darjeeling.) Ripley had relied heavily on Meinertzhagen's skins in his work on the birds of India, and he had never said anything to Rasmussen about suspect specimens. ("He didn't talk to me much at all," Rasmussen says.) Salim Ali, Ripley's co-author and a towering twentieth-century ornithologist, wrote favorably about Meinertzhagen in his autobiography, "The Fall of a Sparrow." Rasmussen therefore had no reason to think, as she put it to me, "that there was anything wrong with the skins."

In 1996, when she was already a few years into planning the Ripley Guide, Rasmussen came across an article in an issue of *Ibis*, the journal of the British Ornithologists' Union. It was written by an Irish ornithologist named Alan Knox, a former curator at the British Natural History Museum who is now at the University of Aberdeen. Knox argued, convincingly, that several of Meinertzhagen's redpoll skins had been relabelled with incorrect data. Knox based his argument on the fact that skin collectors have characteristic styles of "making" a skin. Some slice off a small piece of the skull, in order to scoop out the brains, whereas others cut off the whole back of the skull, while still others take the brains out through the palate. Some birds are made with a full belly, others with a flat belly. The kind of thread, cotton, and internal supports used in making the skin can also differ from maker to maker. Based on an analysis of several preparers' styles, Knox concluded that at least two redpoll skins which Meinertzhagen claimed to have shot in Blois, France, on January 17, 1953, were probably stolen from a series of birds in the Natural History Museum, which had been collected by Richard Bowdler Sharpe decades earlier, in Hanwell, Middlesex, on November 17, 1884. Meinertzhagen had replaced the tags on the birds' feet with new tags, containing false data about where and when they had been collected.

On reading Knox's paper, Rasmussen was immediately concerned. "I thought to myself, If he went to the trouble to steal and change the data on a common bird like a redpoll, wouldn't he also try to fake some of the rarer birds in his collection?"

Several weeks later, Rasmussen travelled to Britain to meet Robert Prys-Jones, the head of the Natural History Museum's Bird Group. The museum's birds are kept in Tring, an hour's drive northwest of London, on the grounds of a private museum established in 1889 for Lord Walter Rothschild, an heir to the banking fortune and an insatiable bird collector. The collection is housed in a new building that abuts the museum, which is now open to the public. The bird skins, the feathers still as soft as the day they were shot, in some cases a hundred and fifty years ago, lie on their sides in acid-free cardboard boxes, on tightly spaced sliding trays, in large white cabinets that form long spooky corridors stretching the width of the building. The corridors are filled with the intensely musty odor of moth cakes. Many of the older specimens bear traces of "arsenic soap," which collectors used to preserve their skins from insects. Among the historical curiosities in the cabinets are birds that James Cook brought back from the South Pacific, and the finches collected by Darwin, among others, on his Beagle voyage, on the beaks of which the theory of natural selection was built. In the basement, there is a long wall of cabinets filled with Lord Rothschild's beloved cassowaries, large flightless birds from New Guinea and Australia that used to roam freely in the park; now they're stuffed and mounted. (The vast majority of Rothschild's birds aren't in Tring, however—a subject that still causes pain within the Bird Group. Some two hundred and eighty thousand Rothschild skins were bought by the Whitney family for the American Museum of Natural History, in 1931. Rothschild, sixty-three at the time, sold the birds for two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, in order to help pay off a peeress who was blackmailing him over an old affair by threatening to tell his mother.)

Rasmussen had been hoping that Knox was wrong about the redpoll frauds, but Prys-Jones assured her that he was not. After the *Ibis* paper, the British Ornithologists' Union asked Prys-Jones and Nigel Collar, an ornithologist at the conservation group BirdLife International, to evaluate the Meinertzhagen specimens. Prys-Jones had a Meinertzhagen redpoll skin X-rayed, and compared the image with an X-ray of a Sharpe skin. “They were obviously from the same maker,” he told me.

The possibility of widespread fraud put Prys-Jones in a tricky position. His first responsibility, as head curator of the collection, was to the collection itself. He had heard rumors that the redpolls were not an isolated case. If fraud was pandemic, it might damage the collection at a time when some scientists were beginning to debate the value of keeping large collections. In the same way that card catalogues in libraries were disposed of once their contents were digitally rendered, so, perhaps, could specimens be removed from museums, once they had been digitally sampled and photographed—freeing up valuable space for revenue-generating attractions like planetariums. “Serious people have seriously suggested that once you digitize the specimens you don’t really need them,” Rasmussen told me, indignantly. “People are asking what collections are good for, why do we need to keep them?”

“I suppose it all started with casual Fridays.”

Nevertheless, Prys-Jones told Rasmussen that he would collaborate with her in trying to track down all the Meinertzhagen frauds among South Asian birds; together they would publish their results. “In the end, what else could we do?” Prys-Jones said.

Meinertzhagen was born in 1878, when the British Empire was at its zenith, and he lived to see its nadir. His mother, Georgina Potter, came from a well-known family of liberal intellectuals; her sister was Beatrice Webb, the Fabian socialist and co-founder, with her husband, Sidney, of the London School of Economics. The Meinertzhagen house was full of important late-Victorian thinkers and liberal politicians. As a boy, the biographer Mark Cocker notes, Meinertzhagen was taken on natural-history outings by Herbert Spencer, the philosopher who coined the phrase “survival of the fittest,” and Thomas Huxley introduced him to Darwin, who allowed him to sit on his knee. Richard’s father, Daniel Meinertzhagen, was a banker of German origin, who had little interest in his wife’s liberal ideas and friends. He once fled the house when George Bernard Shaw came to visit.

Richard, called Dick, was taught to skin birds by Richard Bowdler Sharpe, whose redpolls he would later steal. Sharpe was one of those astoundingly energetic Victorians who collected and catalogued a vast number of natural-history specimens of all types. He was the first curator of the Bird Room at the new British Museum (Natural History), which occupied Alfred Waterhouse’s cathedral-like, terra-cotta-sheathed building that opened in 1881 on Cromwell Road, in South Kensington, to house specimens that had overflowed the confines of the British Museum, in Bloomsbury. (The name of the new building was officially changed to the Natural History Museum in 1992.) As a teen-ager, Meinertzhagen spent many hours skinning and classifying birds there. He also began keeping a diary of his ornithological exploits; this lifelong project would become as critical to his legacy as his skins.

Meinertzhagen had hoped to pursue his natural-history interests at university, but his father had no faith in his scientific ability and sent him to work in the family banking firm, in the City. Meinertzhagen quit after a year to join the Royal Fusiliers, sailing for India in 1899. Moving to East Africa, in 1900, he discovered an avocation for killing. “I have myself felt the magnetic power of the African climate drawing me lower and lower to the level of a savage,” he wrote in his diary. He satisfied his bloodlust by slaughtering animals, and, occasionally, men. “I was surprised by the ease with which a bayonet goes into a man’s body,” he wrote in an account of an attack on an East African tribe, in 1902. He seemed determined to reject the liberal pacifist philosophy of his mother’s side of the family, which he called “a foul, infectious disease.” However, he didn’t entirely forget his scientific ambitions while in Africa: he identified a previously unknown species, the giant forest hog. Named *Hylochoerus meinertzhageni,* the hog is in the British Natural History Museum’s collection.

In 1917, Meinertzhagen served as an intelligence officer for Sir Edmund Allenby, the commander of the British forces in Palestine. While he devised ways to defeat the Turkish Army, he also studied ornithology, using calibration instruments at anti-aircraft gun stations to calculate the speed and altitude of birds. In Palestine, he came to know T. E. Lawrence, who memorably describes him in “Seven Pillars of Wisdom”: “A student of migrating birds drifted into soldiering. . . . He was logical, an idealist of the deepest and so possessed by his convictions that he was willing to harness evil to the chariot of good. He was a strategist, a geographer, and a silent smiling masterful man; who took as blithe a pleasure in deceiving his enemy (or his friend) by some unscrupulous jest, as in spattering the brains of a cornered mob of Germans one by one with his African knob-kerri." Meinertzhagen asked Lawrence to remove this account from later editions, but it remained in the book.

Palestine was the scene of the Colonel's most celebrated wartime action—the Haversack Ruse, in which he duped Turkish forces into thinking that the British would continue their drive toward Jerusalem by attacking Gaza instead of Beersheba. He allowed forged secret documents purporting to be detailed plans for a Gaza offensive to fall into Turkish hands, by making it appear that he had lost the haversack containing them while he was wounded and under pursuit. Not only were the orders and the plans faked but there was also an easily broken code that allowed the enemy to intercept fake messages. The Turkish generals apparently fell for the ruse, and the British achieved a complete surprise and victory at Beersheba, which helped lead to their conquest of Jerusalem, a month later.

After the war, Meinertzhagen was a member of the British military delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, where, in opposition to Lawrence and the Arabists, he aligned himself with the Zionists, vigorously backing Arthur Balfour's Declaration pledging British support for a national homeland for Jews (which was expressed in a 1917 letter to Lord Rothschild, who was a prominent Zionist). This was the beginning of Meinertzhagen's long support for the state of Israel (a square is named after him in Jerusalem). In Paris, the Colonel also had several memorable encounters with Lawrence, which he recorded in his diary and later used in his book "Middle East Diary 1917-1956," published in 1959, twenty-four years after Lawrence's death. One evening in the summer of 1919, Meinertzhagen wrote, a distraught Lawrence appeared at the door of his hotel room. He confessed that the book he was writing about his experiences in the war was not all true, that he "had been involved in a huge lie—'imprisoned in a lie' was his expression," Meinertzhagen wrote. Lawrence then went on to reveal that when he had been captured by the Turkish governor of Deraa, in 1917, he had been sodomized by the governor and his servants. Meinertzhagen begged Lawrence to tell the truth ("I loathe fakes," he said). In a later entry, Meinertzhagen said of Lawrence, "He has a trick of inflating the truth so that one cannot tell which is basic fact and which is embellishment."

In the early nineteen-twenties, Meinertzhagen was a chief political officer in Palestine and Syria and then held important positions in the Colonial Office in London. He retired from the Army at the age of forty-seven, with his pension, resolving to devote himself to ornithology and to spend more time with his wife, Anne Constance Jackson, whom he married in 1921. (He wrote in his diary that he had been offered several attractive diplomatic posts in other countries, including the governorship of the Falkland Islands and Ambassador to Japan, and though he would have liked either, he turned them down because Anne didn't want to leave Britain, "and her happiness counts far more than worldly advancement.") Sup-

HALLEY'S COMET

Miss Murphy in first grade
wrote its name in chalk
across the board and told us
it was roaring down the storm tracks
of the Milky Way at frightful speed
and if it wandered off its course
and smashed into the earth
there'd be no school tomorrow.
A red-bearded preacher from the hills
with a wild look in his eyes
stood in the public square
at the playground's edge
proclaiming he was sent by God
to save every one of us,
even the little children.
"Repent, ye sinners!" he shouted,
waving his hand-lettered sign.
At supper I felt sad to think
that it was probably
the last meal I'd share
with my mother and my sisters;
but I felt excited, too,
and scarcely touched my plate.
So Mother scolded me
and sent me early to my room.
The whole family's asleep now
except for me. They never heard me steal
into the stairwell hall and climb
the ladder to the fresh night air.

Look for me, Father, on the roof
of the red-brick building
at the foot of Green Street—
that's where we live, you know, on the top floor.
I'm the boy in the white flannel gown
sprawled on this coarse gravel bed
searching the starry sky,
waiting for the world to end.

—*Stanley Kunitz*
(*1905-2006*)

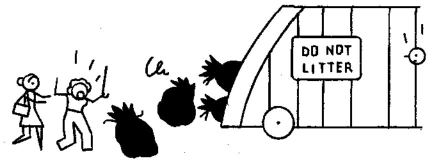
ported in part by Anne, who came from a wealthy family, Meinertzhagen travelled widely in pursuit of birds, including one long trip during 1925 and 1926 to Sikkim and Ladakh, when he collected many of his fourteen unique records on the Indian subcontinent; he published a two-part paper on his work in *Ibis*.

Three months after the birth of the couple's third child, Randle, in 1928, Anne, then thirty-nine, was killed in an accident on her family's estate in Scotland. She and Meinertzhagen were practicing outdoors with a revolver and, as Meinertzhagen was going to retrieve a target, Anne accidentally shot herself in the head while inspecting the gun. The death certificate said that she died of "injury to spinal cord & lower part of brain from a bullet wound at short range." She left the income from her estate to her husband on the provision that he never remarry; he never did. Meinertzhagen's cousin Theresa Clay, who was seventeen at the time of Anne's death, and thirty-three years younger than Meinertzhagen, became his protégée and ultimately his lifelong companion. They lived next door to each other in London, at No. 17 and No. 18 Kensington Park Gardens, but an indoor passage connected the two houses. Under Meinertzhagen's guidance, Clay became an expert in Mallophaga, a type of chewing louse that infects birds. The pair spent the nineteen-thirties travelling together. He would ask the curators of the great skin collections around the world, many of whom were his friends, whether he and Clay could use the collection in order to gather Mallophaga, and further her work. In 1939, they spent one Sunday entirely unsupervised in the American Museum of Natural History, in New York, "shaking out" skins. Clay also accompanied Meinertzhagen on epic birding trips, collecting many birds herself. In 1937, the Colonel named his prize possession, the Afghan snowfinch, a species new to science, after her—*Pyrgilauda theresae.*

In his later years, Meinertzhagen received a series of honors, including Commander of the British Empire. He published a major work of ornithology, "Birds of Arabia," in 1954, and in his final decade produced four volumes of memoirs, mined from his diaries, which became important primary sources for historians of British East Africa and of the First World War. He was bedridden during his last years, after a collision with an overenthusiastic dog in Kensington Park Gardens left him with a broken hip.

When Rasmussen and Prys-Jones embarked on the evaluation of Meinertzhagen's rare South Asian birds, they began with the assumption that the data on the tags were not reliable. They suspected that, as with the redpolls, Meinertzhagen had not only stolen the birds from a museum or a private collection but also invented the data. For this reason, Rasmussen feared that it would be impossible to determine who had actually collected the birds. But the answers were hidden in the skins. Rasmussen and Prys-Jones figured out ways to extend Alan Knox's basic forensic method, building a diagnostic file of the characteristic preparation styles of the major collectors in the region. In hundreds of cases, they X-rayed skins to reveal characteristics that weren't superficially obvious. Once they had identified a suspect Meinertzhagen skin as being made in another collector's style, they could check the museum's register to see if one of that collector's birds was missing. Often, the bird that the Colonel had stolen would prove to be the best specimen of a series of birds shot around the same time. This method allowed Rasmussen and Prys-Jones not only to identify whom Meinertzhagen had stolen the bird from but also, by placing it within a series, to restore much of the data that Meinertzhagen had destroyed when he removed the label.

In several cases, they discovered that stolen birds had been remade by Meinertzhagen, probably in order to conceal the hand of the original maker. The most dramatic example of this type of fraud was *Athene blewitti*, a forest owlet, one of the rarest birds in India. The last reported sighting of it was made by Meinertzhagen, who claimed to have shot the bird at Mandvi, on the Tapti River in Gujurat, in October, 1914. The previous forest-owlet sighting was recorded in 1884, when James Davidson, a colonial official stationed in Western Khandesh, shot several in the jungle below the Satpuras, in Maharastra, about three hundred miles away. Rasmussen and Nigel Collar, of BirdLife, who had once regarded Meinertzhagen as his hero, asked Prys-Jones to lend two of the Natural History Museum's owlets to the Smithsonian—the Meinertzhagen bird and one of the Davidson specimens. The Smithsonian's bird-collection manager, Phillip Angle, slit the wing of the Meinertzhagen owlet, and along the humerus he found a yellowed piece of cotton that the Colonel had probably neglected to remove when he remade the bird. Rasmussen sent a sample of that cotton, along with a sample of cotton from the Davidson bird, to an F.B.I. lab, for fibre analysis. The fibres proved to be identical.



Eventually, Rasmussen and Prys-Jones were able to prove that all fourteen of Meinertzhagen's unique records for species and subspecies in the Indian subcontinent were frauds. The Siberian accentor he claimed to have collected in Ladakh in April, 1925, had actually been collected in Peking by a man named Kibort in September, 1878. The three male willow warblers he claimed to have taken on the same day in January, 1952, in Nagaland, northeastern India, had actually been collected between May and July of 1885 in northwest Siberia by Seebohm and Brown. His single specimen of Père David's snowfinch, which he said he collected in Sikkim in March, 1952, in fact had come from Mongolia, and was collected by Severtzov in 1877. Many more rare birds in the collection turned out to be frauds, too. Meinertzhagen's two Blyth's kingfishers, which he reported shooting in Burma, actually came from the island of Hainan, in China. The Colonel's Andaman tree pie and his extremely rare Seychelles paradise flycatcher were also stolen and fraudulently labelled. In many cases, the false Meinertzhagen data had been incorporated into the subsequent literature; Ripley himself had used the false data in his books. Meinertzhagen brazenly published many of his false records in *Ibis*, "almost like he was daring people to catch him," Rasmussen said.

The profound unreliability of the Meinertzhagen specimens not only put the Ripley Guide in peril, it also threatened to undermine Rasmussen's faith in the efficacy of skins in general, on which she had based her career. Nothing else this large has been known to have occurred in the world of ornithology. The only case that comes close is that of the Hastings Rarities. Between 1892 and 1930, thirty-two of forty-nine new taxa added to the British List—the complete record of the more than five hundred species in the British Isles—were taken from within twenty miles of the town of Hastings, in southeastern England. In fact, the birds were brought from other parts of the world and sold as genuine British birds to collectors eager to have a complete, up-to-date set. The chief suspect was a local taxidermist and gunmaker named George Bristow. When the frauds were finally detected, in the nineteen-sixties, some thirty species had to be removed from the British List.

But Meinertzhagen wasn't interested in money, as Bristow seems to have been. He wanted reputation. In this aspect, his actions resemble those of a British botanist, Professor John Heslop Harrison, of Newcastle University, in the nineteen-forties. Harrison was growing Arctic-alpine plants in his garden, among other places, stealthily replanting them on the Isle of Rum, in the Inner Hebrides, and then using his "discoveries" as evidence to bolster his theory that vegetation predating the last Ice Age survived in some parts of the British Isles. He, too, was suspected during his lifetime, by an amateur botanist named John Raven, but Raven was never able to get a full accounting of the hoax published in a scientific journal.

To Rasmussen, one of the most shocking aspects of the case was the revelation that the authorities at the British Natural History Museum had known for years what the Colonel was up to. In 1995, Prys-Jones began to read the museum's files on Meinertzhagen, and he and Rasmussen discovered official memorandums showing that Meinertzhagen had been caught stealing birds as far back as August, 1919, when, shortly after his return from the Paris Peace Conference, he was apprehended with nine birds in his briefcase as he left the museum. He was subsequently banned from the Bird Room, but managed to get reinstated in 1921, with the help of Lord Rothschild, even though he, too, suspected Meinertzhagen of stealing birds from him. The Colonel had been caught stealing skins again in 1934, and in 1935 he was investigated by Scotland Yard for having removed a volume of the journal *Parasitology* from the museum's library, and for tearing pages out of another volume. But charges were never pressed, and Meinertzhagen escaped public censure. On the contrary, he was made an Honorary Associate of the museum in 1954, and was issued a pass key.

"The latest poll shows your approval rating holding steady at a hundred per cent."

Prys-Jones thinks that some individuals at the museum might have been afraid to accuse Meinertzhagen, out of fear of losing his skins. In 1947, Meinertzhagen had threatened to bequeath his collection to the American Museum of Natural History. The eminent ornithologist Ernst Mayr, who was then the curator of the museum's Rothschild collection, called the Meinertzhagen skins "the finest private collection of birds in existence" and confessed that he was "almost breathless" at the prospect of acquiring it. But the British birdmen, having lost the Rothschild collection to New York twenty years earlier, weren't about to lose the Meinertzhagen specimens. "I think some individuals at the museum might have figured, if he stole birds from them, it didn't matter so much, because they'd get the birds back in the end, when he left them his collection," Prys-Jones told me. "I don't think they knew he was changing the tags, which is a far more serious matter." In any case, the interests of the gentlemen's club prevailed over the interests of science. As was the case in the celebrated fraud involving the Piltdown Man—the fossil, "discovered" in Sussex by Charles Dawson and unveiled in 1912, that purported to show a missing link between the Neanderthals and the Cro-Magnons—the clubbiness of science would keep the truth buried for decades.

As Rasmussen and others began to publish papers on the frauds, she met people who, in one capacity or another, had known Richard Meinertzhagen. A sixty-eight-year-old retired librarian from Tring, Effie Warr, remembered Meinertzhagen from the time she had spent working in the Bird Room in London when she was a young woman. "The museum had given him his own gallery," Warr told me, "and that was where he kept his birds. He was quite old by that point, and nearly deaf, so you really couldn't talk to him, other than say hello. We were told to keep an eye on him, but they never accused him of anything, because they didn't want it to get into the public domain. Because they wanted his birds, you see."

It turned out, too, that in his great work, "Birds of Arabia," Meinertzhagen had relied upon the unpublished manuscript of another ornithologist, George Bates, who had died before finishing his own book. Meinertzhagen had used a copy that he had taken from the British Legation offices in Jidda, not realizing that another copy was held in the British Natural History Museum. The duplicate copy, Warr said, revealed the extent of Meinertzhagen's borrowings.

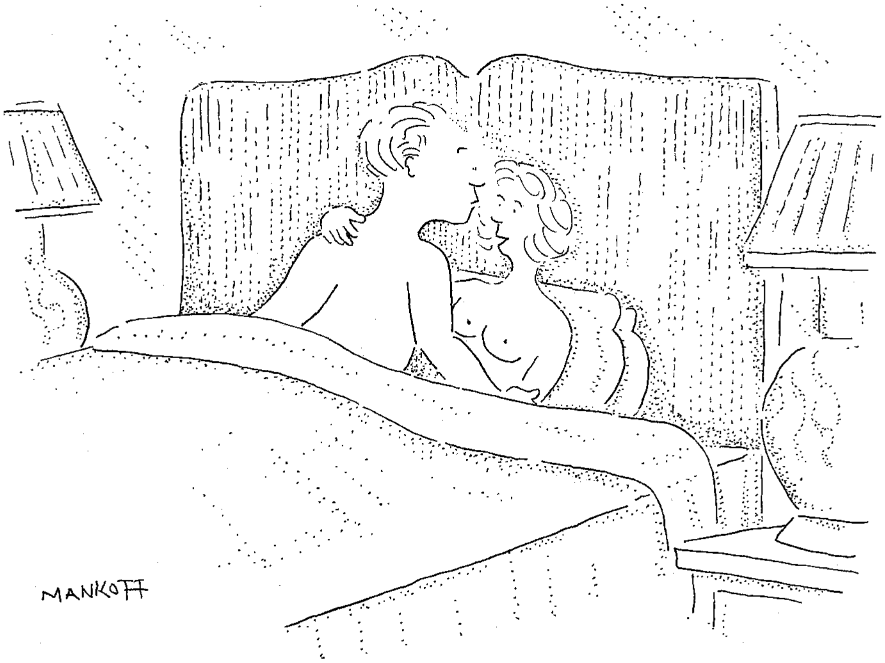
Rasmussen also heard from some of the Colonel's old friends, who continued to support him. In a review of a book that included an article by Rasmussen and Prys-Jones about Meinertzhagen, Bill Bourne, a senior British ornithologist, wrote that "the usual people dance on Colonel Meinertzhagen's grave," noting that he "did more good work than most of their critics put together."

As the ornithologists were exposing the Colonel's bird-skin frauds, several researchers were examining other aspects of his life and legacy. One of these was an independent T. E. Lawrence scholar, J. N. Lockman, who published "Meinertzhagen's Diary Ruse," in 1995. Meinertzhagen habitually typed his diary entries and left behind no handwritten notes, so it is impossible to know to what extent he rewrote or embellished his life and observations. Lockman concluded that "Meinertzhagen's twelve Lawrence entries are virtually complete forgeries of much later date, cleverly conceived but sloppily executed." Diary entries about Lawrence, such as "I believe I was the only one of [Lawrence's] friends to whom he confided that he was a complete fraud," dated 1919, were actually written in the late fifties. (Seen in this light, Meinertzhagen's account of Lawrence saying to him, "Someday I shall be found out," may really be Meinertzhagen talking to himself.) Lockman pointed out that the suspect diary entries that he saw were typed on a different kind of paper than the surrounding entries, with a different typewriter ribbon, and he also noted that the sequence of page numbers does not match the pages immediately preceding and following the entries.

In 2001, Rasmussen met a Los Angeles writer named Brian Garfield, the author of "Hopscotch" and "Death Wish," among other novels, who was working on a nonfiction book about Meinertzhagen. Among the mysteries Garfield was researching was an old rumor, apparently widespread at the time, that Anne Jackson's death wasn't an accident. Garfield suspected that Anne, who was also an accomplished ornithologist (she was an honorary member of the British Ornithologists' Union), had discovered what her husband was up to. She had accompanied him on portions of his long South Asian birding trip in 1925 and 1926, and she might have known that many of the rare birds he claimed from this trip, published in his *Ibis* paper, were not in fact his. When she threatened to expose him, Garfield theorized, the Colonel flew into a rage and shot her.

Garfield, whose book "Meinertzhagen Mystery" will be published this fall, wrote to me recently, "I can add only that my own personal belief—not a fact but an opinion—is that the two doctors' description of the bullet path suggests an angle of entry and exit that is not consistent with accidental discharge of a revolver while it is being checked. To me it suggests that the handgun was slightly above her head, pointed at a downward angle, so that the bullet would enter the frontal lobe and exit farther down through the spinal cord. (If you were to shoot yourself in the eye while looking down the barrel . . . you'd blow off the top or the back of your head—not your spinal cord.) Annie was vigorous but not very tall. Richard was about six feet five. Nobody else was present. No inquest was held. No one was charged with any crime."

Meinertzhagen deposited the seventy-six leather-bound volumes of his diary with the Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, at Oxford University—some four million words chronicling his life as a soldier, birder, spy, and observer of historical personages. Randle Meinertzhagen, a seventy-eight-year-old retired investment banker who is the Colonel's only surviving child, controls access to the diaries. Ran, as he is known, bears a striking resemblance to the Colonel. He seems like a decent man in the difficult position of trying to protect his father from charges that he knows are at least partly true. "I think the old rogue did take a few birds," he told me when we met in London, but added that he probably had some good reason for doing it. "He believed the birds weren't properly skinned or cared for and he could do a better job of it himself." For his father, the ends always justified the means. Ran had a rather distant relationship with him. "If I ever asked him about himself," he told me, "my father would say, 'You can find out



"What do you say we leave the rest to the imagination?"

• •

THE QUICK-RESPONSE FORCES OF
East 89th Street
First we'll get you a Band-Aid. Then we'll sweep up all the broken glass.
NO! DON'T FLUSH MY ROLEX DOWN THE TOILET!
Slowly, slowly, slowly put Snakey back in his terrarium.
What word did I just hear come out of your mouth?
Take that dress off IMMEDIATELY.
By the time I count to three, you'd better get down from there.
What is the meaning of this?
I'm just glad no one was seriously hurt.
Crap.

anything you want to know about me in my diaries,' " which were kept in the drawing room in No. 17 Kensington Park Gardens. Meinertzhagen would add, "Just don't ask me anything about them afterwards."

I spent several days in Rhodes House, reading the diaries. I saw an entry from 1913, when Meinertzhagen returned to birding after years of pursuing larger game: "I fell to the altar of ornithology, as the distressed brain takes refuge in religion." In 1924, on hearing of a report that George Bristow, the Hastings taxidermist, was suspected of claiming birds killed elsewhere in Europe as British birds, he writes, "I know of several cases of disloyalty among egg-collectors, but this is the first occasion on which I have come across dishonesty among skin collectors." His only comment on his wife's death, in 1928, is "We had been practicing with my revolver and had just finished when I went to bring back the target. I heard a shot behind me and saw my darling fall with a bullet through her head." However, in the year following her death there are several long, anguished descriptions of a sort of soul sickness, among them: "My life has been transformed into a desert, which no persons can now people."

In addition to the diary entries, there are many photographs of the beautiful Theresa Clay. She is sometimes depicted in the act of "shaking out" a bird skin for Mallophaga. There is also one nude photo, taken at the beach when Clay was around the age of fifteen.

In 1948, while collecting in the Himalayas, Meinertzhagen writes of receiving a letter from Clay in which she expresses her desire for independence, saying (he reports), "I have to face up to the fact that I shall be left alone at a time when a woman is most likely to feel lonely." Meinertzhagen writes, "Life for me without her would be unbearable, unthinkable, and utterly impossible," and he goes on, "I feel like some caterpillar who for well nigh twenty years has been browsing on a beautiful shrub and has stripped it of leaves and flowers." In the end, however, Clay did not leave him; she remained his companion until his death, marrying only when she was in her mid-sixties. She died, an esteemed entomologist, in 1995. The chewing lice that she and Meinertzhagen collected also went to Britain's Natural History Museum.

Historical artifacts of many kinds are pasted into the diary. One is a letter from Chaim Weizmann, dated June 14, 1948, shortly after Weizmann became Israel's first President, in which he tells Meinertzhagen that he is "deeply grateful . . . to you for your friendship and confidence and help through all these years." There are three pigeon feathers with coded messages written on the shafts. There is careful documentation of the Haversack Ruse, including a letter from the wife of the haversack's owner announcing the birth of a son, which Meinertzhagen forged to add a personal touch to the contents, and a handwritten letter, in Turkish, supposedly found in the rubble of Gaza, that recounts in credulous terms the interception of the Colonel's haversack.

But if there is a Rosebud in the diaries—a key that unlocks Meinertzhagen's motives—I didn't find it. I came away with the feeling that the pages were like the skins: some are no doubt authentic, but so many others may contain false data that one can't be sure what to believe. The Lawrence passages are obvious forgeries, for all the reasons that Lockman pointed out in his book, but, as he noted, these were perpetrated when the Colonel was nearly eighty and more careless: "Only as an eighty-year-old could the once master forger have so lost his touch." What about a memorandum that Meinertzhagen supposedly wrote to David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, dated Paris, 1919, which predicts with uncanny accuracy the 1948 Arab-Israeli War? Could this have been written after 1948? What about the pigeon feathers? The Weizmann letter? It's not even clear that Meinertzhagen conceived the Haversack Ruse or that it actually fooled the Turks. But, if the ruse is itself a ruse, then which is the better ruse? And where does the ruse end?

From time to time during her research, as a welcome break from specimen work, Rasmussen went birding on the subcontinent. She made expeditions to India (where, near Darjeeling, she was walking through a rain forest under an umbrella and realized that the fat drops slithering down the sides were actually leeches), the Andaman Islands, Burma, and the Himalayas, in many cases visiting the places where Meinertzhagen had collected his rare birds.

Rasmussen knows how to shoot birds (she learned in Patagonia, where she collected cormorants) and also how to skin them, but she didn't use her skills very often on these birding trips. (However, she did manage to collect a few specimens in Burma, using a fine-mesh net to entrap the birds. "Then you just give them a little squeeze and that's it, they're dead," Rasmussen said tenderly, adding, "I mean, think of how many birds die because a skyscraper goes up in a migratory area.") But almost everywhere she birded on the subcontinent, taking specimens was politically impossible. "Now, with avian flu, it's even worse," she said.

Sometimes, in the course of her research, she found herself in awe of the magnitude of the Colonel's fraud. He was, for better or worse, the last man to unite science and birding, before the great schism. (His rarest bird, the *Pyrgilauda theresae*, turns out to be authentic.) Occasionally, she said, she had the feeling that Meinertzhagen was her father, although, being of a scientific cast of mind, she doesn't put much stock in notions like this. "In some ways, Meinertzhagen does remind me of my father," she told me. "He was brave, tall, strong, he liked killing animals, and he was unreliable. But that's pretty much where it ends."

The most memorable of her birding trips took place in 1997, when Rasmussen went to India in an unlikely attempt to find *Athene blewitti*, the forest owlet. Without the Meinertzhagen specimen to skew the data, Rasmussen guessed that the bird's range might be much narrower than previously thought, and that ornithologists had been looking for the bird in the wrong places. She searched the jungle near where Davidson, from whom Meinertzhagen had stolen the owlet, had collected his birds. But most of the jungle had been cut down, and after several days of looking Rasmussen was ready to admit that the owlet, lost to science for a hundred and thirteen years, was truly extinct.

On the day before the expedition was due to end, Rasmussen began as she often did, at 4 A.M., listening for owls. By eight-thirty, it was getting hot, and Rasmussen was opening her water bottle when the expedition's leader, Ben King, said, "Look at that owlet," pointing up into a tree. Rasmussen looked and said, in excitement, "It doesn't have any spotting on the crown and the mantle!" (The common spotted owlet displays such features.) The forest owlet remained there long enough for Rasmussen to shoot it. The video was diagnostic, and the owlet made the list.

The birds of South Asia represent only a fraction of the twenty-five thousand birds in the Meinertzhagen collection: the European and African skins, which could be equally riddled with frauds, await examination by other researchers. Prys-Jones thinks that, ultimately, five thousand of the skins in the Meinertzhagen collection could turn out to be fraudulent. Rasmussen and Prys-Jones are preparing a paper, which will enumerate other frauds in the South Asia birds.

Rasmussen, who is now an assistant professor of zoology at Michigan State University, says that while the Meinertzhagen frauds tested her belief in the reliability of specimens, ultimately her detective work with Prys-Jones and others reaffirmed the importance of the skins. "If this fraud had been done only with photographs, or with sight records, we never would have been able to figure out what happened," she told me.

In addition to the bogus Meinertzhagen birds, Rasmussen removed eighty-five other species from the final South Asia list, categorizing them as "hypothetical," largely because she judged the sight records supporting them to be insubstantial. Her decisions were praised by the scientific journal *Nature*, which, in a glowing review of the Ripley Guide, called Rasmussen "brave" and said, "The book's greatest value is that Rasmussen has taken nothing for granted, even information published in Ripley's own works." But the reviewer for a leading birding journal, *British Birds*, chided Rasmussen and her lead illustrator, John Anderton, for excluding so many "undoubtedly valid recent field observations." He added, "Doubtless this reflects the fact that the authors are primarily museum workers." ♦

"And when I became a man, I put away childish thingees. Thingamabobs. Whatever."

LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

CENTRAL CASTING

The Democrats think about who can win in the midterms—and in 2008.

BY JEFFREY GOLDBERG

An enduring predicament of the Democratic Party was revealed one day in August, 2004, when John Kerry, the Democratic nominee for President, and John Edwards, the nominee for Vice-President, visited a soybean-and-cattle farm outside Smithville, Missouri. The announced purpose was to speak about alternative energy sources (soybeans are an important source of biodiesel), but the goal was to express solidarity with rural white voters, who have been abandoning the Democratic Party in disquieting numbers. About a hundred and twenty-five people, mostly farmers, sat on hay bales in an orchard near the farmhouse. Claire McCaskill, the Missouri state auditor, was there, too; she was running for governor and was eager to appraise the two Senators, whose names would be on the ballot with hers.

Kerry reminisced about clearing fields on a Massachusetts farm and promised to side with small farmers in their struggles against agribusiness. Teresa Heinz Kerry handed her husband a note, and then stood up to speak, recalling a visit to an organic hog farm in Iowa. "It's really inspiring to see the work that they did," she said, and encouraged her audience to consider organic farming. "It can be done. It's economical, and there is a huge market in America."

At that point, Winston Simpson, a hog farmer from Clarence, Missouri, stood up and interrupted. "I said, 'Mrs. Kerry, you've got to understand that hog farmers just freak out when they hear people telling them to go organic,' " Simpson recalled recently. "She looked kind of surprised. I was just there helping out, making a crowd, but I've got an adrenaline problem, and when someone pisses me off I jump up and tell them."

Simpson is a grower-finisher; four thousand or so hogs come to him at forty pounds and leave their pens for slaughter two hundred and fifty pounds later. "I'd go broke if we switched to organic farming," he said. His public advice was informed by tactical, rather than ideological, concerns. "I don't have a problem with people raising food organically. If people want to eat that way, fine, but she shouldn't have been pushing that as a solution to the farm problem. A lot of farmers think of those organics as some kind of élitist lunatic-fringe thing." For some, Mrs. Kerry's performance recalled other moments of Democratic campaign obliviousness, like Michael Dukakis's endorsement of Belgian endive as an alternative crop for Iowa farmers.

Simpson described himself as a loyal Democrat who would have preferred to attend a better-orchestrated Kerry rally. "I'm even pro-choice—that's how much of a Democrat I am," he said. He came to that position, he explained, through his knowledge of animal husbandry. "If you've ever seen a young heifer get bred too soon, you know what a fiasco that is, which is why I think teen-agers should have access to abortion. But I'm out of the mainstream on this." He continued, "I always tell people who are running for office that if they want to get elected in Missouri, when someone asks them for their feelings about Roe v. Wade don't give some long scientific talk. Just say, 'I'm against abortion,' and move on quick."

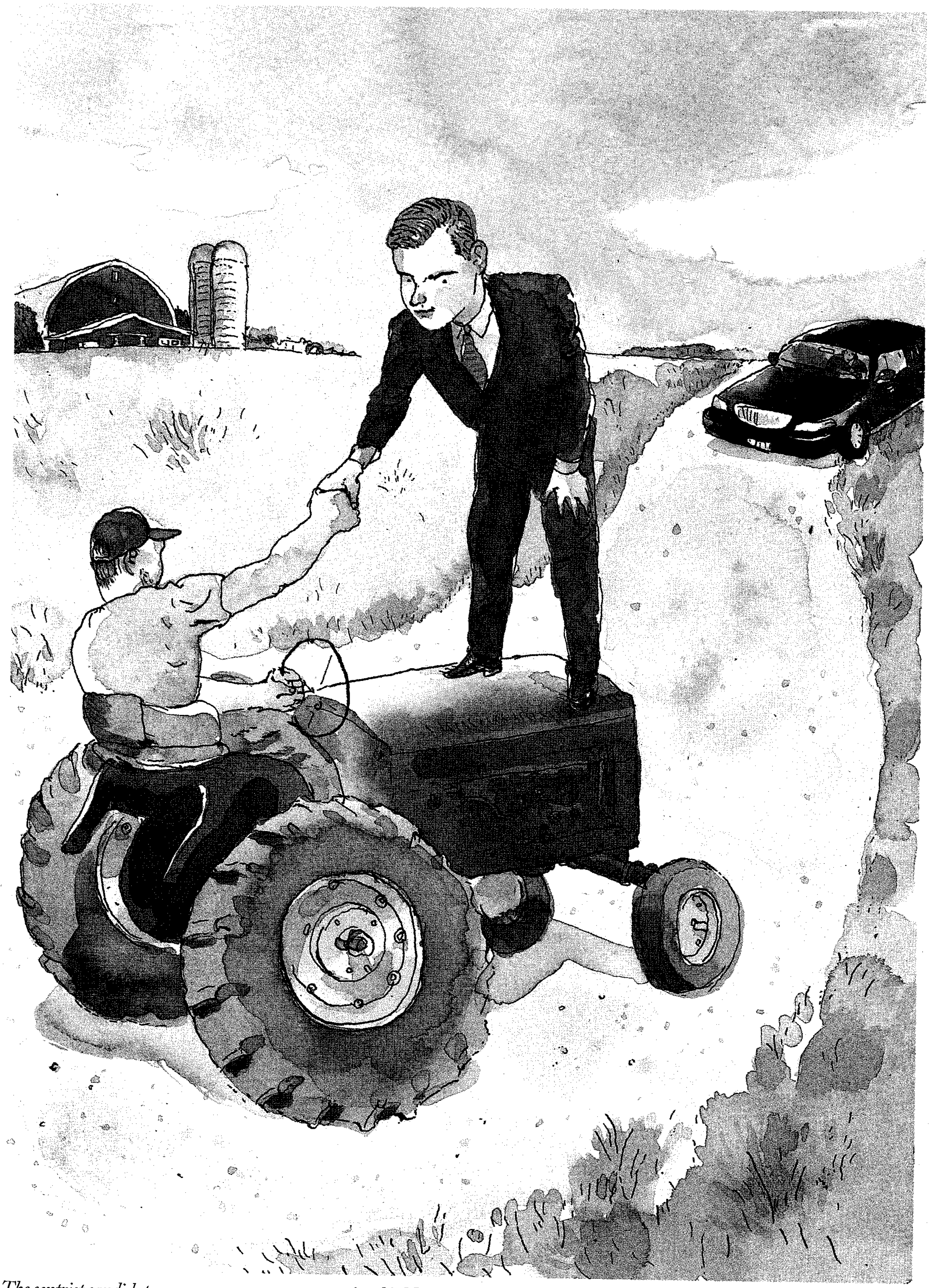
Simpson, whose son, a former marine, served in Iraq, wishes that Kerry had won in 2004. "Kerry couldn't connect with people," he said. "It's too bad, because just think if they got elected—maybe they could have turned this whole thing around in Iraq. Maybe we would be better off today. But they never took the lesson that you shouldn't give the Republicans things that they could use against you."

Claire McCaskill lost her 2004 race for governor, but the contest was close—fifty-one per cent to forty-eight. Kerry lost Missouri to George W. Bush by a slightly wider margin, fifty-three per cent to forty-six. This year, McCaskill is running for the U.S. Senate. Polls show that the race is a statistical tie, and analysts from both parties consider McCaskill to be one of the two or three strongest Democratic challengers in the country. McCaskill says she is a centrist. She is one of many Democrats—Hillary Clinton being the most visible, and the most diligent—who are trying to establish themselves with middle-class moderates. These candidates see an uncommon opportunity this November—and in November of 2008—to win back many "Reagan Democrats," the voters whom the Party lost to Ronald Reagan a quarter century ago: the white working class, suburbanites, and Catholics. The collapse of President Bush's popularity—brought on most directly by his detached performance during Hurricane Katrina, the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandals, and public displeasure with the mismanaged war in Iraq—is working to the Democrats' advantage. Polls show that even on national security—the issue that has favored Republicans since George McGovern's candidacy, in 1972—Republicans are now no more credible than Democrats.

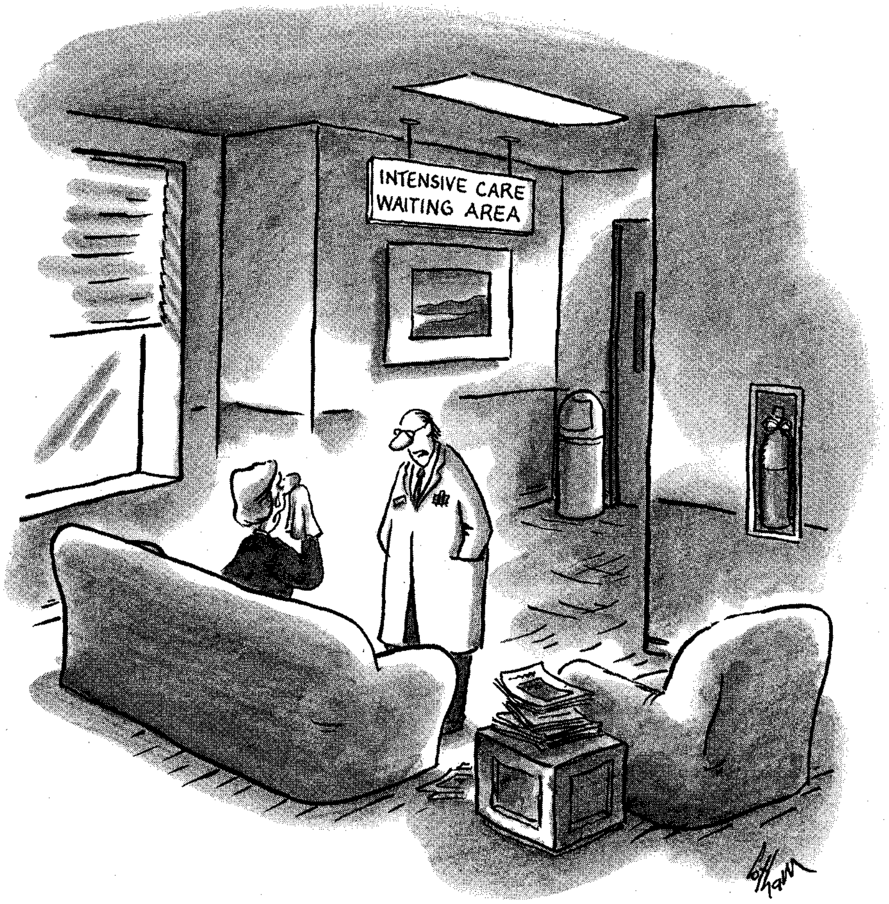
"We could be seeing in George W. Bush a Hooverian Presidency," the Princeton historian Sean Wilentz told me. "This would go a long way to helping the Democrats rebuild a new version of the grand Roosevelt coalition"—one that included a great measure of the country's working class. Wilentz added, though, that "what you need for a Roosevelt coalition, of course, is a Roosevelt."

For the midterm elections in November, the Democratic Party does not need a Roosevelt. Some agree with Newt Gingrich, who recently told *Time* that if he were a Democratic strategist he would run a campaign that simply asked voters, "Had enough?" Many liberal Democrats would like to make Bush's record the focus of the upcoming campaign. Centrist Democrats,

BARRY BLITT



The centrist candidates see an uncommon opportunity this November, and in November of 2008, to win back Reagan Democrats.



"I was able to get in one last lecture about diet and exercise."

though—particularly those running in states that have cooled to their party—think that something more is needed this year, and certainly for 2008, when Bush will be retiring. They argue that their party must speak in language familiar to, among others, the disaffected hog farmers of Missouri.

To take control of the Senate—no longer a fantastical notion—the Democrats need to win six seats; for a majority in the House of Representatives, which has been in Republican hands since 1994, they must take back fifteen. The Senate races are populated with centrists like McCaskill. Among those running for the Senate are Jim Pederson, a shopping-center developer in Arizona; Harold Ford, Jr., a thirty-six-year-old African-American congressman from Memphis, who is running a campaign meant to appeal to conservative white Tennesseeans; and Bob Casey, the anti-abortion state treasurer in Pennsylvania, who hopes to defeat the incumbent Rick Santorum.

McCaskill's Republican opponent, the incumbent Jim Talent, has been hurt in the polls by aligning himself against a Missouri ballot initiative to protect stem-cell research. His stand has been inconsistent, which has alienated some of the evangelical Christians who are part of his core constituency. McCaskill, an ex-county prosecutor who believes in the death penalty and says that she worships, in the Missouri manner, "God and common sense," has made her name as the state auditor by running uncompromising investigations of state government performance. Winston Simpson, the hog farmer, said of her, "She's the kind of woman who could really jerk Donald Rumsfeld through a knothole."

McCaskill is disarmingly loquacious. She is fifty-two and speaks with a flat Missouri accent; the day we met, she was wearing a red suit of a style that, in Washington, one associates with Republican women. "I'm having a good day," she said, almost as soon as we'd said hello. "You want to know why? I'll tell you why. Laura Bush is coming to the state to campaign for Talent, and Vice-President Cheney *and* the President of the United States are coming, too. They must be scared of someone."

The candidate was on a domestic errand. Her sixteen-year-old daughter was applying for a learner's permit, and had forgotten her I.D., so her mother was making a detour home. "Oh, damn," McCaskill said, with a laugh. "I didn't want you to see that I was a rich lady." She is indeed rich, and lives in an oversized modern swooped-roof house beside a creek in a St. Louis suburb. But her wealth is of recent vintage: her second marriage, in 2002, was to a developer. She grew up in small-town southern Missouri. Her father's family kept a feed mill, and her mother had a drugstore that, she says, was "put out of business when Wal-Mart opened up." She worked her way through college and law school as a waitress, and later married David Exposito, with whom she had three children. It was a troubled marriage; Exposito nearly ended McCaskill's political career when he was arrested on a riverboat casino and charged with possession of marijuana. He was sentenced to community service, and he and McCaskill subsequently divorced.

As we drove past strip malls and big-box stores, McCaskill talked about the Democrats she most admires. "I would say I go back before McGovern to find role models. Clinton was an exception in some ways, but certainly not on a personal level. Harry Truman, J.F.K.—those are the role models." She added, "I'm not a liberal. When I was a prosecutor, I saw child murderers, people like that, and so I believe that there is such a thing as evil in this world."

In many ways, McCaskill sounds like any traditional Democrat. She speaks out against oil companies and pharmaceutical companies—she usually gets her biggest applause when she condemns Bush's prescription-drug plan—and she is in favor of abortion rights, although she doesn't make it a central issue. "If people ask, I tell them I'm pro-choice," she said. "That doesn't mean I can't understand the other side of the debate, though." She went on, "Being a Democrat is about balance. It's about being moderate and truthful and strong. Harry Truman, leaders like that, they were strong enough to take on foreign enemies when they needed to, but they were also strong enough to know when not to fight, when to use other weapons besides military force. That's the message the Democratic Party should be sending. We should let the American people know we want to work with allies, work with the U.N., and that we don't like war, but that we'll defend this country's interests with everything we've got."

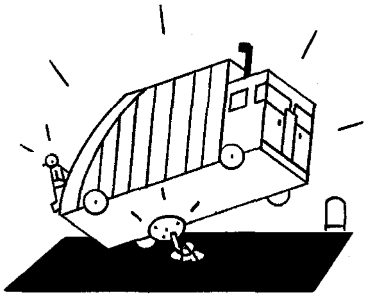
Referring to the Kerry-Edwards campaign stop, she said, "I'm sure Teresa's motives were fine. But I think it's a tone thing. It's the 'We know better' thing. Some of it is completely unfair, but there's a critical number of Missourians who believe that people from the East Coast or West Coast don't think that people in the heartland are smart."

In 2004, exit polls showed that sixty-one per cent of voters who said that they attended church on Sunday supported Bush; Kerry received the support of thirty-nine per cent of the churchgoers. Fifty-nine per cent of voters who were married with children supported Bush, to Kerry's forty. It is difficult for Democrats, who are so closely associated with abortion and gay marriage, to shake off entirely their McGovern-era "acid, amnesty, and abortion" label, and the Party's recent history is a reason that many centrist Democrats still feel uncomfortable about the election, last year, of Howard Dean to chair their party. Dean had backing from the Party's antiwar wing, which supported his briefly astounding run for the Democratic nomination in 2004, but his main support came from state Party leaders, and he has rewarded them by funding a handful of field workers in each state to help fortify the local parties.

Dean has tried to reach out to, among others, evangelical Christians, and he doesn't like what he suggests is the Party's gradual abandonment of the socially conservative but economically liberal working class. "The Democratic Party was built on four pillars—the Roosevelt intellectuals, the Catholic Church, labor unions, and African-Americans," he said not long ago. "But we had stopped communicating with the Catholics and with labor, and so all you had left was the Roosevelt intellectuals and the African-Americans." Nevertheless, Dean often seems almost chemically incapable of communicating effectively beyond his base. Not long ago, at a rally in a union hall in a grimy industrial section of Albuquerque, New Mexico, he drew hundreds of Bush-loathing liberals of the sort who animated his 2004 candidacy. The crowd consisted of union members, including many from unions that represent government workers; Navajo activists from New Mexico's vast reservations; a modest number of hardscrabble Latinos; and a much greater number of retirement-age whites, some of whom came to the event from Santa Fe and Taos and who wore sandals and turquoise jewelry.

Dean was late arriving from the airport, so a succession of local Democratic politicians took to the stage to deliver excoriations of the Republicans. (The popular centrist governor, Bill Richardson, skipped the rally, telling me later that he had been busy.) Many nodded in sympathy when the New Mexico secretary of state, Rebecca Vigil-Giron, told a story about the flag that flies over her house. A neighbor—a veteran, she noted—pointed out one day that her flag was "torn and tattered" and asked her if she wanted him to mend it or replace it. She said no, and explained, "I keep it here because it's going to stay flying tattered and torn because that's how this war is going. It's going nowhere. And it will come down when this war is over." The woman seated next to me, Carol Ann Bowman, the secretary of the Torrance County Democratic Party, leaned over. "I just hate this war," she said. "I don't understand how anyone could vote for Bush." Then she confessed, "I have two children who were in the military, and they voted for him. I just don't understand why."

Dean came into the room at a gallop. The applause was raucous and sustained. "It's like a Dean rally," Bowman said, and, at the podium, Dean proved that he is still ready to follow his own muse, even in public. He was soon improvising an attack on Vice-President Cheney. Referring to Cheney's accidental shooting of a hunting companion in February, he said, "I don't want to get on Cheney's case too much, but this is a hunting state, right? I come from a hunting state. What kind of guy has a beer at lunch and then goes hunting and shoots a guy in the face? For God's sake." Dean's face was turning purple and his neck muscles were stretched tight. "I mean, this is a hunting state, this is New Mexico, right? Vermont's the same way. You know, you don't hunt like that. What kind of hunting program is that? I never heard a respectable hunter do that kind of stuff. Nonsense. Enough already. Go back to Vermont—I mean, go back to Washington. For God's sake, don't go to Vermont." Dean looked over at his fretting public-relations man. "All right, we won't go too far. I can see my staff and the choir over here are getting really nervous."



His words were cheered enthusiastically. So was his praise for the absent Richardson, who recently ended electronic touch-screen voting in the state, reverting to a paper-ballot system. Dean got his loudest applause when he suggested that Republicans were conniving with the manufacturers of electronic voting machines, and he singled out Diebold, a favorite target of bloggers whose rage against the Bush Administration seems limitless. The only statement that was greeted with apathy was a blunt pledge to confront America's enemies. If the Democrats are restored to power, he said, "we will not permit Iran to be a nuclear power, we will make the deal with the Chinese to get nuclear weapons out of North Korea, and we will catch Osama bin Laden or kill him, one or the other."

One of the Democratic National Committee's initiatives under Dean has been to place campaign field workers in every state rather than to concentrate resources where the Party's chances seem most promising—in particular so-called "red states" on the electoral map that may be leaning Democratic. Dean told the crowd that his fifty-state program was going to pay dividends. "If we can win races in Mississippi and Alabama and Utah after only less than a year, because these organizers haven't even been on the ground a year, we can win races anywhere," he said. "You know why? Because this is a Democratic country, with a big

'D.' We ought to be speaking about our values everywhere we go, because the truth is, American values are consistent with Democratic Party values. Most Americans believe that it is immoral for small children to go to bed hungry at night, and we believe those kids ought to be fed, but the Republicans are cutting school-lunch programs."

Dean's fifty-state plan has caused fissures in the Party. Congressional leaders want the D.N.C. to direct its money to states where the odds—and the polls—favor the Democrats. Scott Pastrick, a former D.N.C. treasurer, said, "A lot of people think this strategy is pie in the sky, and this feeling is shared by a lot of the traditional donors. They're wondering why we're not putting resources in winnable states." Representative Rahm Emanuel, of Illinois, who chairs the Democrats' congressional campaign committee, and who has fought openly with Dean on this question, is more disparaging. When I suggested that Democrats in Mississippi were probably grateful for Dean's attention, he said, "If you think that Mississippi and Ohio are the same thing, you're an idiot."

In a restaurant in Santa Fe after the Albuquerque rally, I asked Dean if the crowd's lack of reaction to his stand on national security surprised him. His supporters, he replied, "are more liberal than I am." That is true. Because of his early opposition to the Iraq war, Dean was often characterized as a leftist, but he is a pro-gun, anti-gay-marriage (although pro-civil union) fiscal conservative who sounds hawkish on the question of a nuclear Iran. Dean's stance is actually in harmony with the idea put forth by Third Way, a new centrist group that advises Democrats on ways to speak to moderate voters. (Third Way's views are similar to those of the Democratic Leadership Council, which helped Bill Clinton win the Presidency in 1992, but more sharply focussed on the practical business of electing Democrats.) Third Way argues—and Dean agrees—that the Democrats risk perpetual irrelevance if they write off entire sections of the country.

However, when I asked Dean, not long ago, if Democrats might have to risk alienating core supporters in order to attract national-security voters and cultural conservatives, he replied, his color rising, "Certainly not. Absolutely not. Why would you even think of such a thing? It goes contrary to everything we're doing. No, it's the wrong thing to do." For Governor Bill Richardson, a possible Presidential candidate in 2008, "the key to victory is to develop a coherent national message of optimism and opportunity and not incessantly try to appeal to our base." He said last week, "It's more important to try to appeal to disaffected Democrats and Independents who are on the verge of coming back to us. What is important is that we not just criticize the President, that we have alternative, positive policies."

Democrats have a set of policy prescriptions that they hope to enact if they win majorities in Congress, such as increasing the minimum wage, rolling back parts of the prescription drug law, and reinstating budget deficit controls. But they are only muddling toward a Gingrich-style Contract with America, which, in its drama and clarity, gave 1994 voters an understanding of national Republican priorities. Even on the minimum wage there is no consensus: Party moderates believe that a proposal to make college tuition tax-deductible would appeal to more voters than a promise to raise the minimum wage. As if policy differences weren't enough, the Party's many spokesmen tend to speak disparately and concurrently, especially on matters of national security. Witness the confusion, not long ago, when Representative John Murtha, of Pennsylvania, a former marine, called for an immediate pullout of troops from Iraq, leading to graceless scenes of Democratic leaders scrambling to embrace him and keep him distant, sometimes simultaneously.

Rahm Emanuel, who worked in the Clinton White House, says that the collapse of Bush's support—recent polls put his approval rating in the high twenties—is not enough to propel the Democrats back to power. "We still have to pick the lock here," he said, referring to the difficulty of unseating incumbents, especially in congressional districts that, over the years, have been gerrymandered into single-party redoubts. Some of his colleagues, however, do little to restrain their optimism. "I'll tell you this: if the election were held today, we would win," Nancy Pelosi, the House Minority Leader, who represents San Francisco, told me earlier this month. Pelosi appeared excited by the prospect of one specific consequence of a Democratic victory: "We win in '06, we get subpoena power." Pelosi has said that the Democrats would reserve the right to investigate every aspect of the Bush Administration, including its rationale for the Iraq war.

Pelosi's vision of a subpoena-filled 2007 appeals to her party's most liberal supporters. But there is a worry that such a tack might alienate moderates, and that it would motivate otherwise dispirited Republicans to go to the polls. "You know, if you spend your whole day trying to catch the dog that bit you because all you want to do is kick him, you're not going to win many friends," Brian Schweitzer, the Democratic governor of Montana, told me.

This would be a surmountable problem for Democrats if liberals outnumbered conservatives. But the liberal base of the Democratic Party, even fully mustered for battle, is too small to carry a Democrat to the Presidency, or even to many of the Senate seats being contested in 2006. The math is unforgiving, according to Jonathan Cowan, the president of Third Way. "Exit polls consistently show that twenty-one per cent of Americans self-identify as liberal and about thirty-four per cent as conservative," he said. "And a plurality, about forty-five per cent, self-identify as moderate. So this means that the Democrats have got to pull almost two-thirds of moderate voters to be the majority party." A recent report by the political scientists Elaine Kamarck and Bill Galston argues that greater polarization in the electorate hurts Democrats, for a simple reason: one out of every three voters belongs to the base that in the past Karl Rove has so successfully mobilized; only one out of five belongs to Howard Dean's.

"In 1976, Jimmy Carter eked out a victory with only 51 per cent of the moderate vote because he won nearly three in ten conservative voters," Galston and Kamarck wrote. "In 2004, John Kerry won 54 per cent of the moderates and still lost by 3.5 points because he won a much smaller share of conservatives. With three conservatives for every two liberals, the sheer arithmetic truth is that in a polarized electorate effectively mobilized by both major parties, Democratic candidates must capture upwards of 60 per cent of the moderate vote—a target only Bill Clinton has reached in recent times—to win a national election." Al Gore received the support of fifty-two per cent of self-identified moderates in his popular-vote victory over President Bush, in 2000, but eighty-one per cent of conservatives voted for Bush—"enough to carry Bush through in states Gore needed," Third Way's Matthew Bennett said.

On national-security questions, it is easy to misread even the most encouraging polls. "Before 2004, the Republicans generally polled somewhere around thirty-five points better on such questions as which party is better able to fight terror," Bennett, who worked for General Wesley Clark during his 2004 Democratic primary run, said. "Now that gap has closed entirely, but almost exclusively because people don't trust the Republicans anymore. It's not because Democrats have done something to take advantage of that." Meanwhile, position papers cascade from Democratic think tanks. The Democratic Leadership Council has just issued a book with the barrel-chested title "With All Our Might: A Progressive Strategy for Defeating Jihadism and Defending Liberty," which offers essays by nineteen Democratic foreign-policy and defense experts.

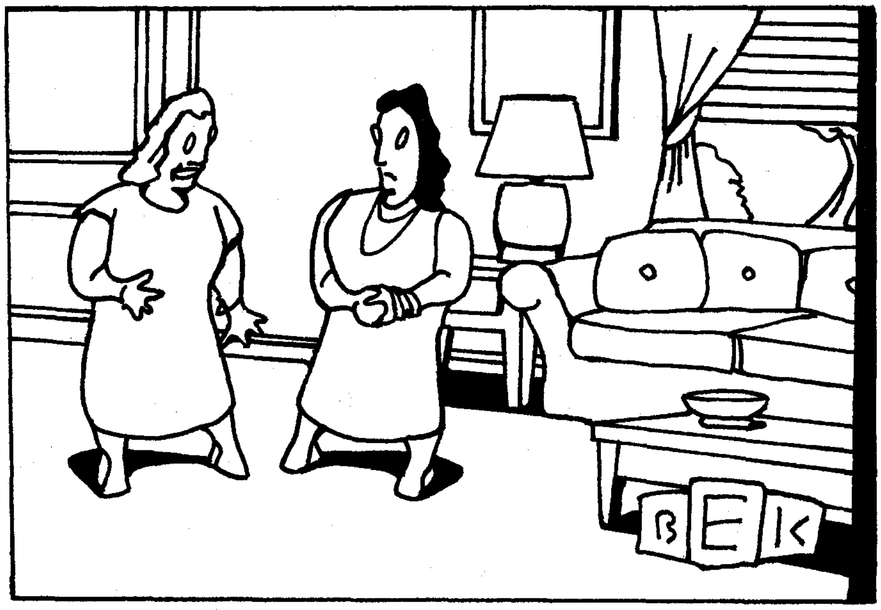
Even the most liberal Democratic officeholders recognize the need to speak to security-conscious voters in ways that will separate them from Republicans. Nancy Pelosi made a game attempt at ferocity when I talked with her. "Here's my thing, and I will say this and you have to bear with me," she said. "I'm a mom. I have five children, and I have five grandchildren. I always say to people, 'Think lioness.' This is how Democrats are. You threaten our children—and that's America—you threaten our country, you're dead. *You're dead.*"

Pelosi, Dean, and Harry Reid, the Democratic leader in the Senate, recently issued a report called "Real Security," which promises a "tough and smart" program of national defense. The report was met with some skepticism in Democratic foreign-policy circles. Leslie Gelb, the president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations (and a former State Department official in the Carter Administration as well as a onetime *Times* columnist), said, "Where I grew up, if you have to say you're tough and smart, you're not."

The "Real Security" report declares that the Democrats will "eliminate" Osama bin Laden, given the chance, although it does not say how. It also says it will implement the homeland-defense recommendations of the 9/11 Commission and provide better support and health benefits for American soldiers and veterans. There is no discussion in the report of the doctrine of preëmption, or of Bush's endorsement of global democratization as an antidote to terrorism, and it states that the Democrats will "insist" that the Iraqis themselves "defeat the insurgency." Democrats are sensitive to charges of defeatism—Howard Dean was widely criticized when he said earlier this year that the war is lost—but the Democratic Party's more hawkish leaders (Connecticut's Senator Joseph Lieberman excepted) no longer argue in terms of victory or defeat. "I don't think we're losing," said Tom Vilsack, the governor of Iowa and the chairman of the Democratic Leadership Council (as well as a possible candidate for President in 2008). "It appears to be a draw. People are upset by the fact that their kids are over there and there doesn't seem to be any end to this whole process. It's not pacifism that makes people think this way. They're questioning the credibility and competence of the Commander-in-Chief."

Though Vilsack is no optimist on Iraq, he still puts himself on the more conservative side of the Democratic spectrum. "I don't think the face of the Democratic Party is Nancy Pelosi," he said pointedly. When we discussed why there had been no domestic terrorist attacks since September 11th, he even echoed Bush's argument that fighting jihadists in the Middle East is preferable to fighting them in America: "We have a hundred and thirty-two thousand Americans in a country where they have a lot easier shot at hitting us than they have here. It's a lot easier to attack us in Iraq and Afghanistan, since they're a lot closer."

Rahm Emanuel notes that nearly five years after the September 11th attacks Democrats still lack an authoritative spokesman on national-security questions. "What we need is a single credible voice," Emanuel said. There is also a worry that the Party will confuse antipathy for the Iraq war with a desire to make national security less of a priority. "We make a mistake if we think that just because people are fed up with George Bush they want George McGovern," Kathleen Sullivan, the chairwoman of the New Hampshire Democratic Party, said. Democrats in Republican-leaning states worry, in particular, that much of the Party's national leadership underestimates the role of patriotism—the im-



"We thought a soulless, desolate community would be good for the kids."

pulse to celebrate American virtues, even in difficult times. Brad Carson, a former Democratic congressman from Oklahoma, appears to see this as a benign sort of nationalism.

"The well-heeled New York, Northern California world of Democrats considers nationalism a very discredited concept, that nationalism equals Brown Shirts," Carson said. (Carson lost his race in 2004 for Oklahoma's open Senate seat. The winner, Tom Coburn, is among the farthest right members of the Senate.) "In most of the country, nationalism is as normal as breathing. I live in a blood-red state, I know"—sixty-six per cent of Oklahoma voters chose Bush in 2004—"but this holds true across thirty states. The Democrats have to look like they axiomatically stand up for America's interests if they're going to be competitive."

Claire McCaskill fits the Carson model: she sounds pugnacious, and not overly nuanced, on the subject of national defense. Though she believes in multilateralism, she also asserts, "We need to be the strongest country on the planet, so I view our problems as 'What do we have to do to maintain our strength?' In Washington, there's this hyper-dissection of Iran, all these layers of complication—what's going on with China, and Russia, and so on. For Missourians, the issue is: Iran is thumbing its nose at us. If we're so strong, why are they thumbing their nose at us? The reason is because the President is letting it happen. If he's so tough and smart, how did he let this happen?" McCaskill doesn't attempt an answer; the clear implication is that Administration fecklessness is to blame.

Barack Obama, the freshman senator from Illinois, who has quickly won a national following, is troubled by demands for an immediate withdrawal from Iraq. "The two foreign-policy issues that have bloggers most fired up are getting the troops out of Iraq and sending troops to Darfur," he said. "They are exactly right to be fired up about Darfur. It is in our national interest to stop states from failing, and to stop genocide. But they also have to recognize that if we are willing to engage militarily in those circumstances, then there certainly are situations that call for direct military engagement in defense of our national interests." Iran, he believes, is an example of a country that might one day warrant the attention of the American military. He looks at the war in Iraq as a test of American credibility—which is why he doesn't support an immediate withdrawal, even though he believed that the original invasion was ill-conceived and badly executed. In front of Illinois audiences, he said, "I'll talk about the fact that we are less equipped to deal with Iran because of the Iraq war." Obama has been criticized on the Party's left for his stance on Iran, but voters in Illinois approve of his position, he said.

There is a desire among many liberals to see the Democrats more energetically oppose the Bush Administration's domestic surveillance program, and its treatment of detainees at Guantánamo Bay and other U.S. facilities—to campaign, in short, against the Administration's perceived immorality as well as its mismanagement. "We have a good message to send about the rights of innocent Americans," Senator Russell Feingold, the Wisconsin Democrat, who recently led an unsuccessful attempt in the Senate to censure Bush, said. "We believe that folks who have done nothing wrong should not be abused. If we don't go out there and say it, there's going to be a sense that we're hiding, that they've successfully intimidated us. I see myself in the middle of a creative process of transforming the Party into one of boldness. If you go into your foxhole, they win."

When I asked Rahm Emanuel if he thought that the Democrats should make civil liberties a focus of the upcoming campaign, he replied, "Middle-class American families are proud of their country. Economic security is the issue we should be talking to people about." Obama, making much the same point, said, "Americans want to feel good about themselves and their government. They can be called upon to sacrifice, and they can be ashamed when we fall short of our ideals, but they don't believe that the main lesson of the past five years is that America is an evil hegemon." The proper lesson of Iraq, Senator Christopher Dodd, of Connecticut, said, is that the Democratic Party should run not to the left of President Bush on national security but to the right: "It's a better opportunity than Jack Kennedy had when he ran on the phony missile gap. We have real issues."

To run to the right of the G.O.P., Democratic centrists say, the Party's candidates must learn how to speak the language that conservatives speak. Third Way has distributed a primer on countering the traditional Republican emphasis on national security. It cautions Democrats to "take fear seriously," and says, "Voters will not respond to approaches that ignore fear, mock it or try to intellectualize it away, like calling Bush a 'fear-monger.'" The voters, the guide says, "need to know that you understand the dangers we face." The primer counsels Democrats to "show comfort with the military," and warns candidates not to "pity or patronize the troops when criticizing the war. Remember that they are serving their country and proud of it." The guide goes on to note, "Progressives have always been surprised that the morale among troops deployed in Iraq is quite high—they are doing their mission."

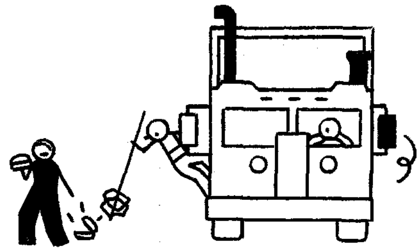
Bush's diminished credibility on national security should help Democrats in local races this fall, Dodd said, but 2008 is a different matter—for the obvious reason that Bush won't be running. A John McCain candidacy, or the nomination of the Massachusetts governor, Mitt Romney, would alter the dynamic in ways that cannot now be measured; in 2008 voters may have a choice between candidates with more similarities than differences on issues like national defense, health care, individual opportunity, and whatever appears to be the latest iteration of "family values." Dodd is convinced that the Party is so weary of losing that its voters will make their decisions strategically. "The Party won't nominate someone who starts in a hole. They will make that determination if they perceive a person not to be a winner. They want to win. They really want to win."

Claire McCaskill knows the price that Democrats pay when they send a Northeasterner to Missouri. Although she said that she didn't blame Senator Kerry for her own loss—"The person on the top of the ballot always affects what happens to local candidates"—she added that Kerry would not be coming to Missouri to campaign for her. "John Kerry is a good man and a brave man, but he's from the city," she said. When I asked what she would do if Howard Dean showed up to endorse her, she said, "I'm not afraid to say I disagree with Howard Dean. I can go toe-to-toe with Hillary Clinton or Ted Kennedy if I disagree with them."

Hillary Clinton is a sensitive subject for McCaskill. After the governor's race two years ago, many Missouri Democrats assumed that in 2008 McCaskill would make another run against Matt Blunt, the Republican who defeated her. But she has told people in Missouri and in Washington that a ticket led by Clinton would be fatal for many Democrats on the ballot, and that a Clinton candidacy would rule out her chance to win the governorship. "The Democratic Party has to look at candidates who can be competitive in all fifty states," she said. A few days later, at the annual Jackson Day dinner of the Greene County Democrats, in Springfield, Republican protesters held signs labelling her "New York's third senator."

In states like Missouri, coolness toward Hillary Clinton puts many Democrats in an uncomfortable position. Harold Ford, Jr., is close to both Clintons. He is running a strong race in Tennessee—if he wins, he would be the first popularly elected African-American senator from the South. When I asked Ford if Hillary Clinton would be campaigning with him, he said, "I'm not running away from her position on the war or her position on energy independence. I'm doing events with her." When I asked him where, he said, "In Washington."

Some Democrats fear any association with national Democrats, who are perceived to be too liberal. "I had this notion that I could convince people who were skeptical of national Democrats to vote for me because I could bring home the bacon, or because I could find some personal pitch to them," Brad Carson, the former Oklahoma congressman, said. "But it was very hard for people to separate me out from Hillary Clinton. All their ads were Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, John Edwards, and me. They said I was more liberal than these guys, and that if I went to Washington I'd be supporting their agenda. I found that extremely difficult to overcome."



Across Missouri, I heard similar fears. At a breakfast fund-raiser for McCaskill in Kansas City, Katheryn J. Shields, a Democrat who is the chief executive of Jackson County, which encompasses Kansas City, said of Hillary Clinton, "She's great." But when asked if Clinton should be the Party's nominee, Shields said, "That would be a hard one." The outgoing executive director of the Greene County Democrats, Nora Walcott, was more direct. Though she said she was to the left in the Party, she feared that Clinton's liberal credentials would alienate Missouri voters. "You've got to tell the people in Washington not to nominate Hillary," she told me. "It would do so much damage to the Missouri Democratic Party." Clinton's obvious shifts to the center frustrate Walcott on two counts, she said: "I disagree with the way she's going to the right, but my biggest problem with it is that it's not working. People don't believe she's a moderate."

Uncertainty about Senator Clinton's real views seems to be more troublesome than the views themselves. She has always been less liberal than some believe, and at times her centrism is ostentatious, as when she spoke in favor of a law banning flag-burning. Clinton has reached out to anti-abortion voters, she refuses to call for a troop withdrawal from Iraq, and she has become a new friend of Rupert Murdoch, the proprietor of the onetime Clinton-bashing New York *Post* and Fox News, who is hosting a fund-raiser for her this summer. All of this recently led the Washington *Post* columnist Richard Cohen to write, "Does she know what she believes? Do we know what she believes? Hillary, help us. Who the hell are you?"

Clinton, who is expected to easily win a second Senate term in New York, refused to be interviewed for this article; she has apparently decided not to discuss Democratic political strategies for now. But her chief strategist, Mark Penn, said that Democrats in conservative states would benefit from a Clinton candidacy. "She has a wildly enthusiastic base, much larger than anything we have seen in a long time. People say about her what they say about President Clinton: wherever he went, votes followed." Penn also said that Clinton could win over skeptical voters in red states. She has done so in upstate New York, where she continues to be popular.

Only a few nationally known Democrats have been invited to Missouri to speak on Claire McCaskill's behalf; one was Obama, whom she described as "so popular that we have to get him back." Obama returns the compliment: McCaskill, he told me, "is a terrific candidate who is deeply rooted in Missouri and understands the people of Missouri." He added, "A successful swing-state candidate can and should stand for progressive values, but they've got to appeal to common sense and pragmatism as opposed to ideology. I think what doesn't work in these places is a sense that you are ideologically liberal."

The former Virginia governor Mark Warner, who was the keynote speaker at the Jackson Day dinner in Springfield, was another welcome visitor. (Springfield is perhaps the most conservative part of the state; it is home to John Ashcroft, the former Missouri senator and United States Attorney General, and it is also the headquarters of the Assemblies of God.) The crowd applauded Warner after watching a campaign-style video that highlighted his achievements in education and business development in Virginia. (It did not mention that he had raised taxes.)

Since the Lyndon Johnson landslide of 1964, only two Democrats have won the Presidency—both moderate Southern governors. Warner, who has shown signs of interest in becoming a Presidential candidate in 2008, argued elliptically against a Hillary Clinton run for President, saying that it would be self-defeating for the Party to nominate someone who has appeal in only sixteen states. He criticized what he calls the "triple bank shot" approach of focussing on the Northeast and the West Coast and hoping for a win in Florida or Ohio: "There's no reason to write off whole regions of the country." Warner said that he represents the "sensible center" of Democratic politics: fiscal soundness and a robust but selective national-defense strategy. When I mentioned that Missouri Democrats seem to resent what they see as the condescension of national Party leaders, Warner said, "Part of this is just showing respect. Respect for culture, faith, values. You know, not everybody wants to live in a big city. The assumption sometimes is 'Why wouldn't you want to be in the middle of where all the action is?' I think people in rural America may talk a little slower, but they get a good sense of whether you understand where they're coming from. Sometimes the folks in the press have translated that into 'Well, that means it's only about faith.' I don't think it's only about faith; it's about values and respect. It's about being comfortable at a NASCAR race as well as in a boardroom."

In 2001, when Warner ran for governor of Virginia, he sponsored a NASCAR truck, campaigned enthusiastically in the state's conservative southwest, and even commissioned a perishable bluegrass song extolling his candidacy. None of this spared him from having to visit Springfield's Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World, which is advertised as the world's largest hunting-and-fishing store. There Warner submitted to one of the most reliable humiliations of Democratic politics: the firing range. Though his spokeswoman described him as "more of a rock climber than a hunter," Warner, entourage in tow, found himself facing a paper target eight yards in front of him.

"Eight yards?" a local reporter asked. "That's not a lot of distance."

The Bass Pro Shops guide gave Warner a petite .22 to fire. "You generally want to start out with something small," he explained. Warner managed to put holes through the target, although he missed the bull's-eye.

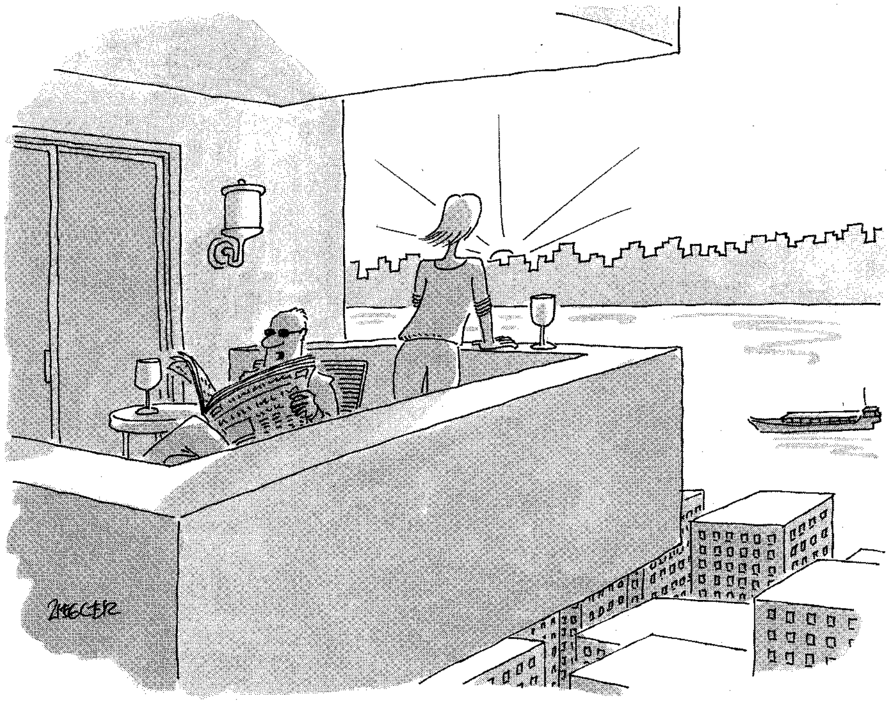
Later, he turned to more substantive issues. "One of the challenges we've got right now is that this Administration is undermining the American people's confidence that our national government can get anything right," he told me. "You know, whether it's successfully removing Saddam Hussein or getting Iraq to a stable position, or whether it's reacting in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina or getting the prescription-drug-benefit program right."

Warner does not believe that the Democrats automatically benefit from popular unhappiness with the Administration. "I think the Republicans bear the vast majority of the blame for these things, but there's a little bit of a 'plague on Washington' feeling now." The Democrats, he said, would serve themselves better by focussing less on Bush's problems. "I get some criticism from Democrats who say, 'Well, Warner, you're not giving us enough red meat all the time.' But the case has been made. We don't need to remake the case of all the mess-ups of this Administration. What we've got to do now is answer the question 'All right, if we turn the keys over to you guys, what are you going to do differently?' " Warner added that the Party needs to start by trying to reach beyond its liberal base: "Sometimes the Democrats advocate tolerance, except for people who don't agree with them."

The Democratic Party of 2006 bears little resemblance to the party that dominated American politics from 1932 until 1964. But if the New Deal coalition has dissolved, there is a persistent desire to revive it—and to modernize it—especially among those who feel estranged from the Party's national leadership. "We used to be the party of the big tent," Montana's Governor Schweitzer said. "We have to respect regional differences. A Democrat in Montana looks a little different than one from Massachusetts. You don't have to agree with my idea about gun control, but you've got to respect it."

Schweitzer's idea about gun control is this: "You control your gun and I'll control mine." In 2004, Schweitzer became the first Democrat elected governor of Montana in twenty years; he won fifty per cent of the vote, to his opponent's forty-six. (Kerry lost to Bush in Montana by fifty-nine per cent to thirty-nine.) Schweitzer did not win by posing as a Republican, he said. "In the first ninety days, we put more money into K-through-12 education than anyone had ever done; we used the money from a new tobacco tax to help small businesses buy health insurance for their employees; we passed a law to incorporate a curriculum about the great achievements of our Indian population into our schools; and we passed a law to require that fifteen per cent of our electricity will come from wind power or solar power. Now, does that sound ruby-red to you? Or does it sound progressive?

We're not hiding as Democrats out here." Success, he said, comes in the approach. "Democrats are losing elections because they're less likable sometimes. They want to explain the whole book, and voters want the Cliffs Notes. Most of us go to church on Sunday to hear a sermon. We don't want candidates telling us about all the things that are wrong." There are certain issues that can't be neutralized by a friendlier manner, he conceded, such as the Second Amendment. "We have about nine hundred and twenty thousand people here, and about six or seven million guns. This is who we are. You can't get around it. But you can accept it."



"I didn't spend $5.6 million on this place to get involved with the damn sunsets over New Jersey."

For more than thirty years, since the Roe v. Wade decision, nothing has been so divisive for disaffected Democrats as the Party's stand on abortion. But here, too, the Party appears to have become more pragmatic; it has, for instance, embraced Pennsylvania's Bob Casey, the anti-abortion, pro-gun candidate for the Senate, which would have been unimaginable ten years ago. (Casey's father, the late Pennsylvania governor Robert Casey, Sr., was not allowed to address the 1992 Democratic Convention, because he refused to endorse the Democratic ticket, which favored abortion rights.) Abortion-rights groups are uneasy when Democratic centrists urge them to shift the discussion from "a woman's right to choose" to the need to reduce the number of abortions. Recently, at a meeting held at the Center for American Progress, the left-leaning think tank founded by the former Clinton chief of staff John Podesta, an abortion-rights activist named Rachel Laser, a former senior counsel at the National Women's Law Center, was impatient with the refusal of others to view abortion as a moral issue as well as a personal one. "I said at this session that there are 1.3 million abortions in this country and that's too many, and it's too many for the majority of Americans," Laser, who runs Third Way's Culture Project, recalled. "Polls show that a majority of Americans think that abortion is morally wrong some or all of the time, and we have to address that."

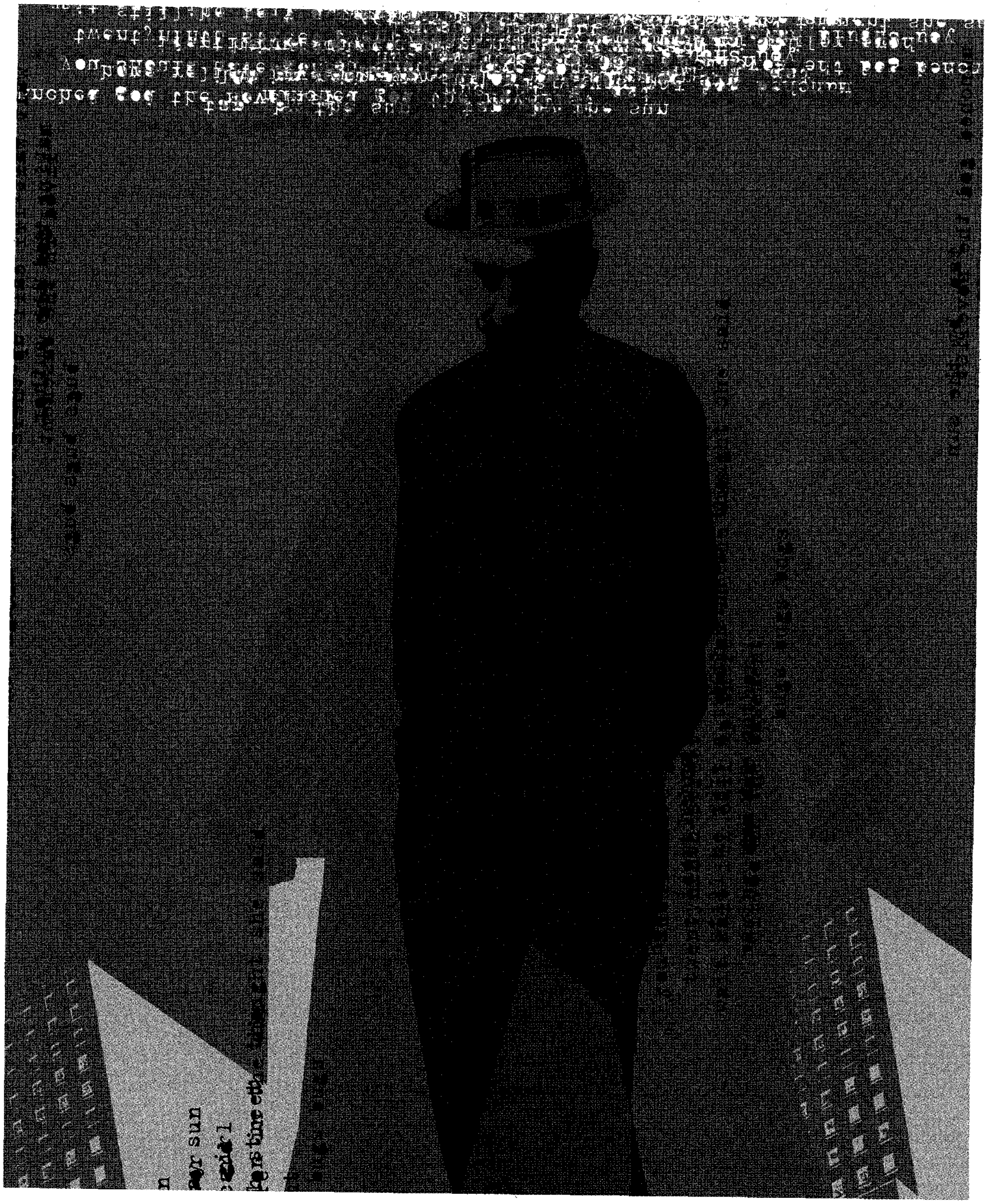
After Laser spoke, the moderator asked the audience "by a show of hands, how many people here think that 1.3 million abortions is too many abortions?" As Laser remembers the moment, "It was only me and maybe one other who raised our hands. I definitely touched a nerve. The fact is the majority of Americans are pro-choice, but the majority of Americans also see something sad in what this procedure does." Laser believes that Democrats have an opportunity to attract voters troubled by Republican inflexibility, and she called the South Dakota legislature's recent ban on all abortions a bracing example of extremism. But, she continued, liberal Democrats must learn to speak to people who feel differently about things. "If you're a candidate in many parts of the South or the Midwest, you shouldn't be using the old frames of choice and individual rights, because against the frame of life you will likely lose. You can neutralize the playing field by talking about reducing the number of abortions. If progressives are going to win nationally, they have to meet the American people where they are."

The Democratic Party's challenge, though, is not only to recalibrate its positions on abortion and national security but also to persuade voters that Democrats have something essential to offer: an aptitude for governing. Moderates argue that a year after Katrina Americans are searching for plausible and competent leadership. (Michael Dukakis, who in 1988 campaigned against charisma, may have been a prophet without honor.) But, the argument continues, candidates must express concern for the welfare of their audiences, have a vision of an equitable society, and, perhaps above all, learn to speak without condescension. "Every time a pro-state-income-tax candidate runs in New Hampshire, they get their butt kicked," Kathleen Sullivan told me. "And then what you have is Democrats who say, 'Well, we just have to educate people more.' Well, no, that's not what we have to do. We have to not nominate someone who is for a state income tax. The voters don't need to be educated on this. They know what they believe." Sean Wilentz, the Princeton historian, said, "The impulse behind the people who run the party is humanitarian, and humanitarians have a problem in American history—they're always trying to perfect you, make you better." Wilentz added, "Acceptance of human imperfection would do a lot to help the Democratic Party." ♦

FICTION

GOD THE NOVELIST

BY HENRY ROTH



The Home Relief investigator called on Thursday: a dark-complexioned, middle-aged woman, Jewish, wearing glasses. As soon as she entered my room, having climbed three flights of stairs to get there, she made for a chair and, panting, ensconced herself. She asked me about my writing—information she had evidently obtained from my Home Relief dossier. Was I close to completing anything I could sell? According to statements made when I first applied, I had said I expected to sell my first short story by June of 1939. It was now May, she pointed out. I was in a psychological jam, I explained, and that was one of the reasons I had moved uptown: to be near my agent—to consult with her. "I don't like this room," I said. "It's small and without ventilation. I'd like to move if I could find a better one."

She said that my landlords were among the worst on her list. They had seized a young woman's clothes when she couldn't pay.

"I've told them about the bedbugs I find in the bed," I said. "They haven't done a thing about them. There're a couple of fresh ones I've got on a pin on the curtain."

She flinched. "That's awful."

"I'd like to move out."

"I don't blame you. But please don't mention that I said so."

"I certainly won't. Point is, I'm trying desperately to get off relief. And a decent place to write in would help."

"I'll leave you a note admitting you to my office. This coming Tuesday." She began writing on a pale-green slip of paper. "I've got a list of available rooms, much better than these."

"Thanks. Tuesday?"

"Yes, I'm in the office all day." And, with eyes rigidly averted from the window curtains, she left.

Later in the day, when I dropped in on my friend Frank Green, he asked me whether I had obtained my new Home Relief identification card, now being issued because of widespread chicanery. I hadn't. "She never mentioned it," I said.

He produced his own glistening new card to show me. "Your story about the bedbugs must have thrown the woman off," he hypothesized. "You'll have to get one."

JOHN RITTER

"Oh, shit," I lamented. "Why do these things happen to me?"

"You don't want to overdo things," Frank counselled. "Let people go about their jobs. That makes them feel better. Just sit back. That's what I do."

"Oh, nuts. To be like you. To let"—I gesticulated—"to let experience flow by you."

"What's the use of fightin' it?" Frank herded a bit of tobacco behind his upper lip. "Where does it get you? Things'll happen when they're ready."

"That's the difference between us."

Frank smiled speculatively, and wiped errant strands of tobacco from the corners of his lips. He looked so much like James Joyce: gray mustache, eyeglasses, distinguished, sensitive features. Irishmen both. "Don't forget to ask her for the new card when you see her Tuesday," he advised.

"I may go there tomorrow."

"There's no hurry," Frank said. "Next Tuesday's soon enough."

"I'd like to get it over with."

"Well, don't tell 'em about the bedbugs. It distracts 'em. That's the landlord's business."

"*Bedboogs*," I mocked. "There's no such word."

"You are gettin' a case o' the nerves," he said.

"I gotta get outta that goddam room. It's stifling."

From Frank's place I went to visit my agent, Virginia N, to get her reaction to a sketch I had slaved over for the past several nights: about my crucial encounter with Vivian, when I had proposed marriage to her. She had been typing somebody's master's thesis on a portable—to earn extra cash. And when I said I was in love with her, and asked her to marry me, she replied, "I'm sorry. You're out of luck," and, apparently agitated over a typing error, she slapped at the portable. To her horror, the light machine bounced from the card table to the carpeted floor, and she sprang up, pale with fright, to retrieve it.

I thought the incident made for a good short piece of prose, suitable perhaps for *The New Yorker*. But Virginia was dissatisfied. I internalized too much. My feelings were like a lead coffin, she said.

"Well, how are you going to tell what the character feels if you're not inside him," I demurred.

"Oh, no" was her riposte. "God the Novelist knows, the narrator knows."

So, today, God the Novelist thought He'd better go over to the Home Relief Bureau and get His new identification card, which His investigator had failed to give Him. But He thought He'd wait until the Chinese woman who cleaned His room arrived, and perhaps ask her if she had something with which to exterminate bedbugs. Instead, the landlord himself arrived bearing a clean sheet, two towels, and a spray can, and apologized for creating a disturbance.

"Oh, no," God the Novelist said, "that's all right. Spray all you like." And He left the room.

Down on the ground floor, a blue bandanna around her head, her eyes heavily mascaraed, the landlady was dusting the walls with a feather duster.

"Ah, I see General Housecleaning is calling on us today," He jested.

"Oh, yes." She perceived His allusion, and laughed.

God the Novelist stepped forth into the radiance of noon. Let's see, He thought. What was that address the investigator gave me? Not wanting to go back upstairs to retrieve the note, He tried to visualize the figures written on the slip of paper she had tendered Him. Oh, yes, 249 East Forty-eighth Street. He walked toward Forty-ninth Street. At Forty-ninth Street, He looked up at the street sign. It read "Forty-ninth Street." What the hell are you doing on Forty-ninth Street? He reproached himself. You should be on Forty-eighth Street. He was on the point of turning back— "Why, you goddam fool," God the Novelist muttered wrathfully. "That's your own street. That can't be right."

He saw a postman emptying a letter box into a canvas pouch. "Say, where's the Home Relief Bureau around here, Mister?" God the Novelist asked.

"You got me," the postman said. "There's none around here."

He headed back toward the house again to look for the address. After He had made such a clever remark to the landlady about General Housecleaning, returning would spoil the effect. Try Major General Housecleaning as a fillip, as a refreshing alteration. Bah.

He saw a man crossing Second Avenue. The man had long blond hair—not long blond hair that might go with a violin, but long blond hair as slick as ice on the back of his head and at the nape of his neck, as ragged as ice against a stream bank. In short, he needed a haircut. He had a puffy face, too—probably he tippled, and tippling, quarrelled, and quarrelling, got beaten, though he bore no scars to show for an affray, only puffiness. Got plastered and got pasted, God the Novelist thought. Got huffy and got puffy. But in what book could He put that?

"Hey, listen, Mac," He said, assuming the role of a character in one of His own new stories. "Where's the Home Relief Bureau around here?"

"It's on Thirty-eighth Street," the puffy blond man said. "Wait a minute. I'll have a look." He drew out of his shirt pocket a folded sheet of paper, unfolded it, and presented it to view. It was a notice from the Placement Division of the Home Relief Bureau, and somewhere in the middle of the page of print was the address: 325 East Thirty-eighth Street.

Just then a car's brakes screeched, rubber caterwauling as a vehicle slid on asphalt. And just then a man jumped out of the way of a black Packard limousine, and just then the uniformed chauffeur lost his composure and bawled at the pedestrian: "Get the hell outta the way, you rummy bastard!"

And just then the puffy blond man cried out, "Jesus!"

"Jesus Christ," God the Novelist exclaimed. The two watched the drunk lurch off the sidewalk.

"It's on Thirty-eighth Street," the puffy blond man said.

"I'll just walk over, I guess."

"O.K."

He crossed the street, and then remembered something else He'd forgotten: His old Home Relief identification card. Oh, God, He thought, now I have to go back. To His great relief, there was no landlady in the hall, and so His witticism remained inviolate.

He climbed the three flights of stairs. The landlord was making the bed. God the Novelist searched among His papers on the table.

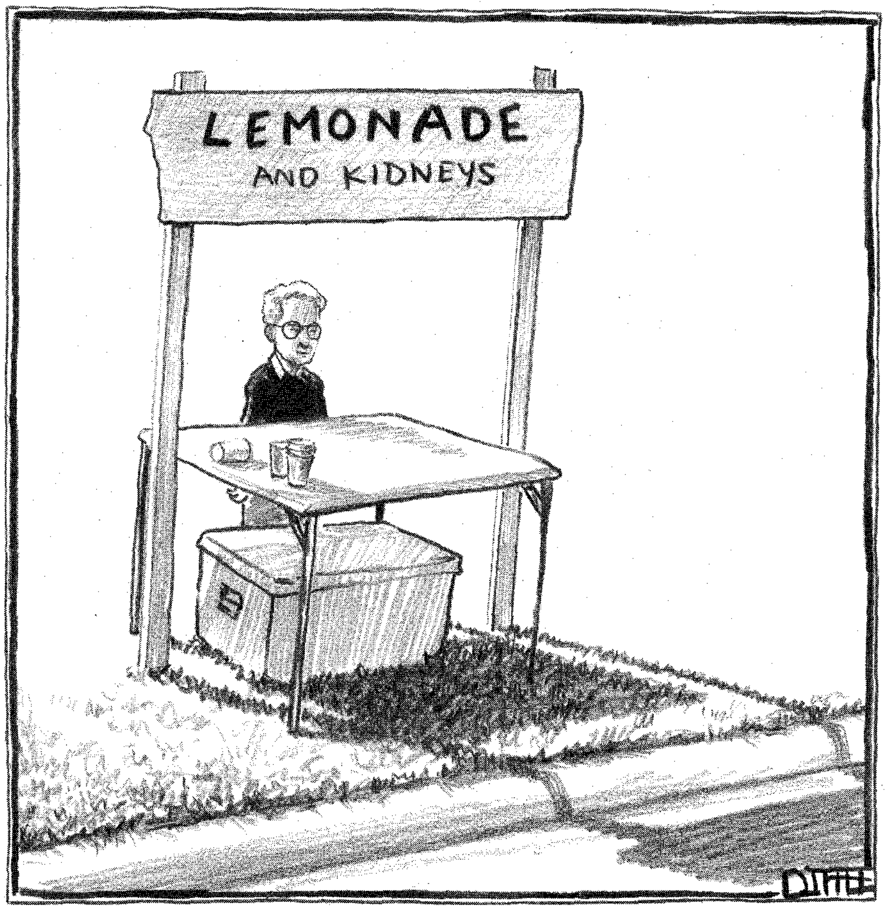
"Did you forget a book?" the landlord asked.

"Yeah, I forgot a book." God the Novelist ransacked His jacket pockets. And, just as He found His wallet, the landlady came in; and that made three of them in the little room. And He was very embarrassed, for it was a very tiny room indeed; and once, when a deliveryman had brought a typewriter, he had said, "Holy smoke, what a room! You gotta go outside to turn around." So God the Novelist was very much embarrassed now, because He was being gypped, overpaying for the room, and He didn't want His landlord to be embarrassed because he was gypping his tenant. So He avoided looking at His landlord and landlady in order not to distress them. Still, He felt a tension in the air, as of something pent up and impending, and He thought, Well, they are ill at ease, and hastily withdrew.

He went downstairs again, and into the radiance of a half hour past noon, and began walking downtown. He hadn't bothered to search for the pale-green slip of paper, because He now knew the address of the place where He wanted to go. What was that number again, 325 East Thirty-eighth Street? Or 328 East Thirty-fifth Street? Well, He could always ask some other working stiff in the neighborhood.

And at Forty-fourth Street, where there was a construction job for a new building going on, He stopped to lean against a low barrier made of the battered doors of the old razed tenements that had once stood there. He rolled a cigarette out of Bull Durham and admired the excavation that opened below: the wall of rock had just recently been blasted out for foundation, rock in which the long drill grooves still remained. Mica schist, He thought, Manhattan mica schist. Ah, the pristine, naked, sparkling purity of it, come to light after aeons, as if awakening. Where could He put that in a book? And soon a brand-spanking-new skyscraper would be standing there, all steel girders and concrete, rearing aloft.

A construction worker, perhaps a foreman or superintendent, with fingers



as stubby as the ends of bricks, and of the same color, came over and glanced at the cigarette that God the Novelist was rolling, and then he glanced at God the Novelist. I've got that professional air, God the Novelist told Himself. No. He thinks I'm a Westerner come to visit the World's Fair; I've got the negligence of the gun-toting Westerner.

The construction man walked away—without spitting down into the huge pit or doing anything else significant. He just walked away.

Brand-spanking-new rock, God the Novelist thought. I mean a brand-spanking-new rock, mortise, for the skyscraper. Or an apartment house. Ah, to live in a brand-spanking-new apartment house, instead of— Oh, I know, it suddenly occurred to God the Novelist, I know why they were embarrassed, my landlord and landlady, why, of course. It was the two bedbugs I impaled on that hatpin they use to hold the closet curtains together. No, there is no closet; the curtains merely serve as an enclosure. Well, how would you describe that to a reader? They serve as an enclosure in lieu of a closet. Oh, the hell with it. It was the two bedbugs—that's what it was—that I had impaled for evidence that were the cause of the embarrassment.

Why, you damned fool! God the Novelist thought, now thoroughly nettled with Himself. It wasn't that at all. That's not what the tension was about, that constraint you felt in your room. You haven't paid them this week's rent. And today's the day it's due. Why, you horse's neck.

He walked into the Home Relief Bureau. Thirty-eighth Street was the right street. The henna-haired woman at the receptionist's desk asked Him His business. He explained: He had failed to get His new identification card.

"Oh, this isn't the right place," she said.

"No? Where should I have gone?"

"You should have gone to Twenty-ninth Street. Wait, I'll call up." She did. "They want to know why you didn't ask your investigator for the card," she said, lowering the telephone.

"I didn't know. I only found out afterward."

"He just didn't ask her," the woman with the henna hair said, and listened to the reply. And finally: "All right. They said come down to Twenty-ninth Street tomorrow morning and ask for your investigator."

He went out into the radiance of one o'clock. The whole trip had been for naught. Oh, my God, thought God the Novelist.

He walked to His sweetheart's house. She lived in the basement. He knocked on her window and crowed like a rooster. This morning, when He had called on her at breakfast, He had barked like a dog. She laughed as she opened the iron-grille gate.

"Coffee?" she asked when He came into her room.

"Yes, thanks," He said, and looked at her: her face was extraordinary, a loveliness set against time's ebb and flow. She was such a rare fusion of the disparate, at once unpretentious and sovereign, a gaucherie of limb bonded to finest perception, to finest breeding, pianist's slack wrists combined with noble brow. "You know, darling," He said, "the difference between the average man and the artist is the difference between apprehension and sensibility. The average man apprehends. The artist senses. The average man would have noticed that his landlords were silent, and would have addressed the question to himself: Now, why are they silent? And rationally, in a logical fashion, he would have arrived at the correct conclusion that it was because he owed them a week's rent." God the Novelist felt the glow of His own lucidity shed all about Him.

"Yes," His love said, spreading grape jelly on a slice of bread.

"But I, without even the aid of thought, by direct intuition alone, sensed that I owed them a week's rent. And that most precious thing, my intuition, my sensibility, my agent wants me to discard."

"Not to change the subject, dear." His love set the plate in front of Him. "Do you have the room rent?"

"No. Not yet," God the Novelist said, munching. "She says there's only one way out for me. I've got to become God the Novelist, and I'm rehearsing the role." ♦

(*The above is adapted from the almost two-thousand-page unedited novel manuscript that Roth was working on in the early nineteen-nineties.*)

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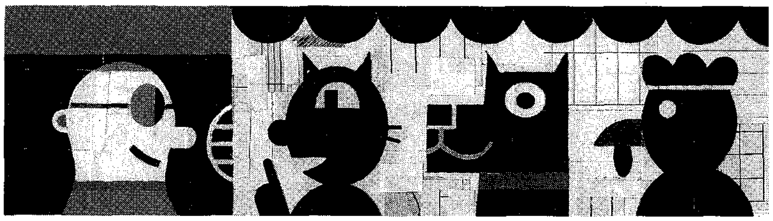


THE CURRENT CINEMA

HEAVEN CAN WAIT

"The Da Vinci Code."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The story of "The Da Vinci Code" goes like this. A dead Frenchman is found laid out on the floor of the Louvre. His final act was to carve a number of bloody markings into his own flesh, indicating, to the expert eye, that he was preparing to roll in fresh herbs and sear himself in olive oil for three minutes on each side. This, however, is not the conclusion reached by Robert Langdon (Tom Hanks), a professor of symbology at Harvard, who happens to be in Paris. Questioned by Bezu Fache (Jean Reno), the investigating policeman at the scene, Langdon starts rabbiting about pentacles and pagans and God knows what. But what *does* God know, exactly? And can He keep His mouth shut?

Help arrives in the shape of Sophie Neveu (Audrey Tautou), a police cryptographer. She turns out to be the granddaughter of the deceased, and a dab hand at reversing down Paris streets in a car the size of a pissoir. This is useful, since she and Langdon are soon on the run, convinced that Fache is about to nail the professor on a murder charge—the blaming of Americans, on any pretext, being a much loved Gallic sport. Our hero, needing somebody to trust, does the same dumb thing that every fleeing innocent has done since Robert Donat in "The Thirty-nine Steps." He and Sophie visit a cheery old duffer in the countryside and spill every possible bean. In this case, the duffer is Sir Leigh Teabing (Ian McKellen), who lectures them on the Emperor Constantine and the Council of Nicaea, in 325 A.D. We get a flashback to the council in question, and I must say that, though I have recited the Nicene Creed throughout my adult life, I never realized that it was originally formulated in the middle of a Beastie Boys concert.

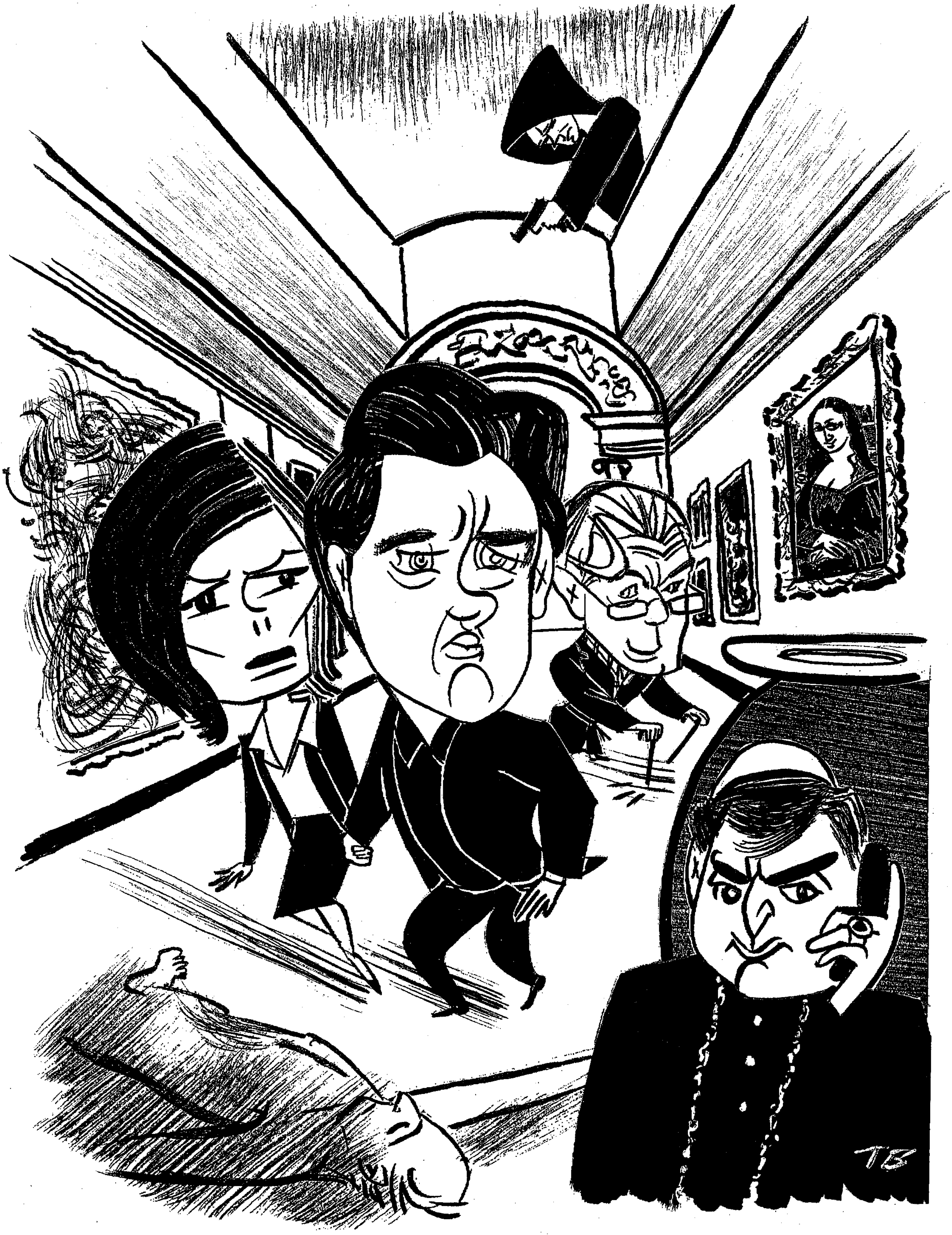
Fache is not the only hunter on Langdon's scent. There is also Silas (Paul Bettany), a cowled albino monk whose hobbies include self-flagellation, multiple homicide, and irregular Latin verbs. He works for Opus Dei, the Catholic organization so intensely secretive that its American headquarters are tucked away in a seventeen-story building on Lexington Avenue. Silas answers to Bishop Aringarosa (Alfred Molina), who in turn answers to his cell phone, his Creator, and not much else. Between them, they track Langdon and Sophie to England, where a new villain, hitherto suspected by nobody except the audience, is prevented from shooting his quarry because there is, unusually for London, a gaggle of nuns in the way—God's Work if ever I saw it, although I wouldn't say so to a member of Opus Dei.

The task of the Bishop and his hit man is to thwart the unveiling of what Teabing modestly calls "the greatest secret in modern history," so powerful that, "if revealed, it would devastate the very foundations of Christianity." Later, realizing that this sounds a little meek and mild, he stretches it to "the greatest coverup in human history." As a rule, you should beware of any movie in which characters utter lines of dialogue whose proper place is on the advertising poster. (Just imagine Sigourney Weaver, halfway through "Alien," turning to John Hurt and explaining, "In space, no one can hear you scream.") There is a nasty sense in "The Da Vinci Code" that, not unlike Langdon, we are being bullied into taking its pronouncements at face value. Such nagging has a double effect. First, any chance to enjoy the proceedings as hokum—as a whip-cracking quest along the lines of "Raiders of the Lost Ark"—is rapidly stifled and stilled. Second, one's natural reaction to arm-twisters of any description is to wriggle free, turn around, and kick them in the pentacles. So here goes.

There has been much debate over Dan Brown's novel ever since it was published, in 2003, but no question has been more contentious than this: if a person of sound mind begins reading the book at ten o'clock in the morning, at what time will he or she come to the realization that it is unmitigated junk? The answer, in my case, was 10:00.03, shortly after I read the opening sentence: "Renowned curator Jacques Saunière staggered through the vaulted archway of the museum's Grand Gallery." With that one word, "renowned," Brown proves that he hails from the school of elbow-joggers—nervy, worrisome authors who can't stop shoving us along with jabs of information and opinion that we don't yet require. (Buried far below this tic is a fear that their command of basic, unadorned English will not do the job; if Brown feels that way, he's right.) You could dismiss that first stumble as a blip, but consider this, discovered on a random skim through the book: "Prominent New York editor Jonas Faukman tugged nervously at his goatee." What is more, he does so over "a half-eaten power lunch," one of the saddest phrases I have ever heard.

Should we mind that forty million readers—or, to use the technical term, "lemmings"—have followed one another over the cliff of this long and laughable text? I am aware of the argument that, if a tale has enough grip, one can for a while forget, if not forgive, the crumbling coarseness of the style; oth-

TOM BACHTELL



Audrey Tautou, Tom Hanks, Paul Bettany, Ian McKellen, and Alfred Molina in the adaptation of the Dan Brown novel.

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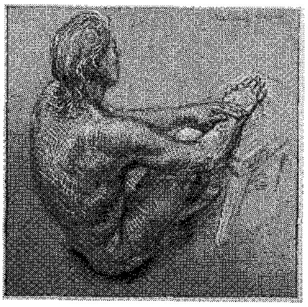

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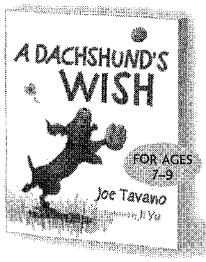

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erwise, why would I still read "The Day of the Jackal" once a year? With "The Da Vinci Code," there can be no such excuse. Even as you clear away the rubble of the prose, what shows through is the folly of the central conceit and, worse still, the pride that the author seems to take in his theological presumption. How timid—how undefended in their powers of reason—must people be in order to yield to such preening? Are they reading "The Da Vinci Code" because everybody on the subway is doing the same, and, if so, why, when they reach their stop, do they not realize their mistake and leave it on the seat, to be gathered up by the next sucker? Despite repeated attempts, I have never managed to crawl past page 100. As I sat down to watch "The Da Vinci Code," therefore, I was in the lonely, if enviable, position of not actually knowing what happens.

Stumbling out from the final credits, tugging nervously at my goatee, I was none the wiser. The film is directed by Ron Howard and written by Akiva Goldsman, the master wordsmith who brought us "Batman & Robin." I assumed that such an achievement would result in Goldsman's being legally banned from any of the verbal professions, but, no, here he is yet again. As far as I am qualified to judge, the film remains unswervingly loyal to the book, displaying an obedience that Silas could not hope to match. I welcome this fidelity, because it allows us to propose a syllogism. The movie is baloney; the movie is an accurate representation of the book; therefore, the book is also baloney, although it takes even longer to consume. Movie history is awash, of course, with fine pictures that have been made from daft or unreadable books; indeed, you are statistically more likely to squeeze a decent movie out of a potboiler than you are out of a novel of high repute. The trouble with Howard's film is that it is far too dense and talkative to function efficiently as a thriller, while also being too credulous and childish to bear more than a second's scrutiny as an exploration of religious history or spiritual strife. There is plenty going on here, from gunfights to masked orgiastic rituals and mini-scenes of knights besieging Jerusalem, yet the outcome feels at once ponderous and vacant, like a damp and deconsecrated Victorian church.

This is grim news for Tom Hanks, who has served Howard gamely in the past. How does the genial mermaid-lover of "Splash," or the jockish team player of "Apollo 13," feel about being stranded in this humorless grind? Apart from Paul Bettany, who finds a leached and pale-eyed terror in his avenging angel, the other players seem bereft. Molina, so violently vulnerable in "Spider-Man 2," is given no room to breathe, and, as for Audrey Tautou, it is surely no coincidence that Howard sought out and hired almost the only young French actress who emits not a hint of sexual radiation. "The Da Vinci Code" may ask us to believe that Jesus married Mary Magdalene, that she bore him a child, and that the Catholic Church has spent two thousand years not merely concealing this but enforcing its distaste for the feminine (and thus for all bodily delight), but did the movie have to be *quite* so pallid and prudish about breaking the news? Whose side is it on, anyway?

Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, except at Columbia Pictures, where the power lunches won't even be half-started. The Catholic Church has nothing to fear from this film. It is not just tripe. It is self-evident, spirit-lowering tripe that could not conceivably cause a single member of the flock to turn aside from the faith. Meanwhile, art historians can sleep easy once more, while fans of the book, which has finally been exposed for the pompous fraud that it is, will be shaken from their trance. In fact, the sole beneficiaries of the entire fiasco will be members of Opus Dei, some of whom practice mortification of the flesh. From now on, such penance will be simple—no lashings, no spiked cuff around the thigh. Just the price of a movie ticket, and two and a half hours of pain. ♦

THE YOUTH OF TODAY
From the graduation ceremony program of St. Helena High School, in California.

The Senior Class kindly requests that, in keeping with the dignity of the ceremony, guests refrain from air horns, whistling shouting, or appropriate behavior.

BOOKS

BIG BIRD

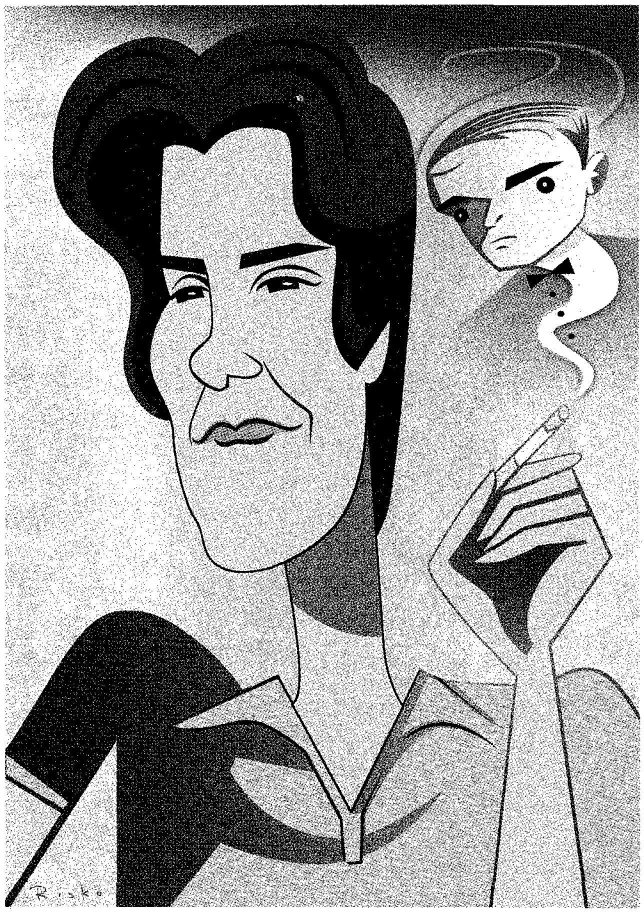
A biography of the novelist Harper Lee.

BY THOMAS MALLON

"Harper Lee is the moral conscience of the film," Bennett Miller, the director of "Capote," explains in an interview included on the movie's DVD. "We were looking for an actor who had composure and dignity and a maturity of spirit and a morality and a sober-mindedness." But though Miller acknowledges that "people who have those qualities tend not to go into acting, as a rule," he fails to note that such people do not tend to swell the ranks of creative writers, either. Any viewer of Catherine Keener's lambent performance in "Capote" is prepared to believe that she possesses all these traits, but they would not naturally recommend her for an authentic portrayal of the plain and sometimes stubborn Harper Lee, the subject of Charles J. Shields's new biography, "Mockingbird" (Holt; $25).

During the Second World War, Lee, a student at Huntingdon College, in Montgomery, shunned the standard cardigan-and-pearls attire of the all-female institution in favor of a bomber jacket she'd been given by her brother, an Army Air Corps cadet. Her language was "salty," and she sometimes smoked a pipe, and, while her face seems to have been pleasantly approachable, she described herself as "ugly as sin." After she transferred to the undergraduate law program at the University of Alabama, mostly to please her father, her lack of polish struck some as ill-suited to the judicial decorum she was being trained to observe.

Growing up, she had preferred tackle to touch football, and tended to bully her friends, including the young Truman Capote, who, during the late nineteen-twenties and the thirties, was fobbed off by his feckless mother on relatives who lived in Lee's home town, Monroeville. He put her into his fiction at least twice—as Idabel Tompkins ("I want so much to be a boy"), in "Other Voices, Other Rooms," and as Ann (Jumbo) Finchburg, in "The Thanksgiving Visitor." Lee did the same for him in "To Kill a Mockingbird," turning the boy Truman into Dill, an effeminate schemer with an enormous capacity for lying. One year, Lee's father gave her and Truman a twenty-pound Underwood typewriter, which the two children managed to shift back and forth between their houses and use in the composition of collaborative fictions about the neighbors.



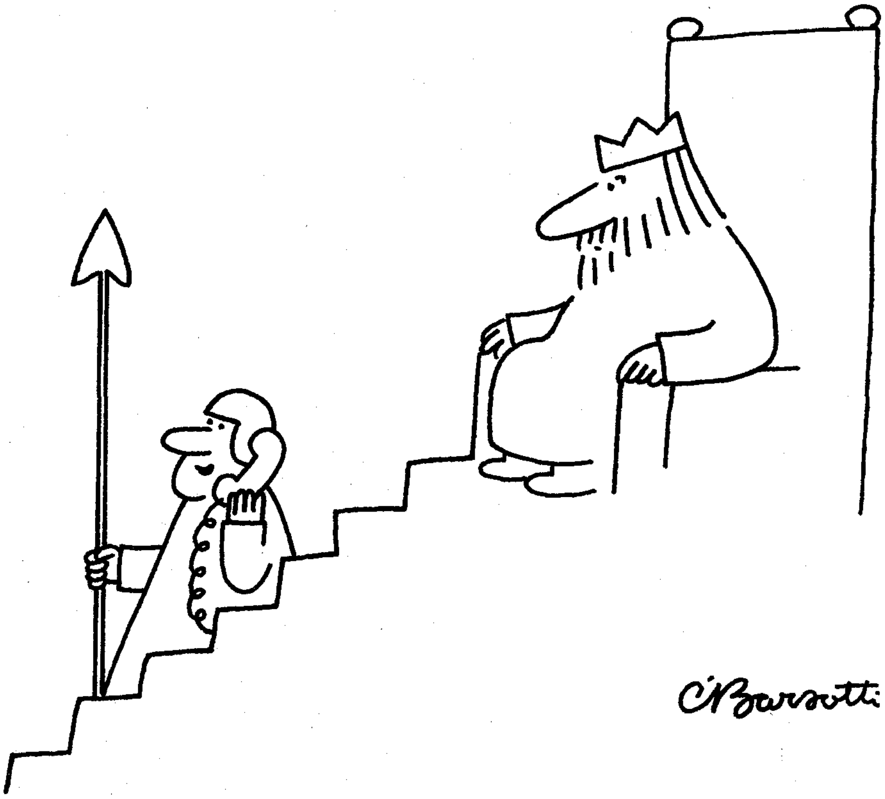
Lee triumphed with a novel that avoided moral complexity.

ROBERT RISKO

In 1959, when Capote asked Lee to accompany him to Kansas while he looked into the murder of the Clutter family, he was thirty-five and already famous, a sort of self-hatched Fabergé egg—the author of high-gloss magazine journalism, some dankly suggestive Southern-gothic fiction, and the silvery "Breakfast at Tiffany's." Lee was just reaching the end of a decadelong literary struggle. After dropping out of the University of Alabama, in 1948, the year Capote published his first book, she had gone to New York to write one of her own, despite her father's apparent belief that literary success was unlikely to favor Monroeville twice. In the city, she scrounged for change in parking meters and used an old wooden door for a writing desk. She spent most of the fifties living in Yorkville, on the Upper East Side, working as an airline ticket agent and failing to impress the other artistically ambitious Southerners she ran into. "Here was this dumpy girl from Monroeville," one of them recalled years later. "We didn't think she was up to much. She said she was writing a book, and that was that."

Michael Brown, a lyricist who worked with Capote on a musical adapted from his story "House of Flowers," became, along with his wife, Joy, a crucial friend and benefactor. In 1956, as a Christmas present, they gave Lee enough money to take a year off from her job. Brown also steered her toward the husband-and-wife agents Maurice Crain and Annie Laurie Williams, who had sold the movie rights to "Gone with the Wind." The couple were cool to Lee's short stories, but were willing to take a chance on a novel called, first, "Go Set a Watchman"; then, at Maurice Crain's suggestion, "Atticus"; and, finally, "To Kill a Mockingbird." The Crains sold the book to Lippincott, and Lee was nervously awaiting the galleys when she got Capote's call about the Clutter killings.

For much of the past forty years, ever since it began to look as if Lee would not publish a second novel, a story has per-



"You bet I'd love a free trip to Cancún."

sisted that it was actually Capote who wrote "To Kill a Mockingbird." He did suggest some cuts, but extensive editorial correspondence between Lee and her agents and publishers argues for her authorship, as does Shields's reminder of "Truman's inability to keep anybody's secrets." Since the appearance of Bennett Miller's film, however, it is Lee's role in Capote's work that has been the subject of literary discussion. Shields cites scholarly and hearsay evidence that Lee was angry at having her contribution to "In Cold Blood" slighted and at being made to share the book's dedication with Capote's lover, Jack Dunphy. Like Miller's movie, this new biography seems to be a brief for her indispensability to Capote's nonfiction novel. She becomes a kind of collaborator, not just someone who smoothed the author's way among the weathered and suspicious residents of Finney County, Kansas. Capote did give Lee credit for being "extremely helpful" in "making friends with the wives of the people I wanted to meet," but he had brought her along principally as a confirmatory pair of eyes and ears.

The hundred and fifty pages of notes she took show that she was operating in Kansas with the confidence of a soon-to-be-published writer. She was unafraid to propose to Capote a much darker view of the Clutters than the one he was beginning to set down himself. Interviews she conducted, and her inspection of the family's house, convinced her that the Clutters' emotional arrangements had been inhumanly rigid, enough to have turned the mother, Bonnie, into "one of the world's most wretched women," a nervous, medicated creature, bedridden with the sense that she had failed her go-getting husband. What Lee took to be the strange and greedy behavior of the two oldest Clutter daughters, who had moved out of the house before the murders, sealed her impression of a tight collective misery that must have rendered the existence of Nancy Clutter, the perfectionist teen-ager who was shot along with her parents and brother, an ongoing torment. How, Lee wondered in her notebook, had the girl avoided "cracking at the seams"?

Capote wasn't having it. He might allow the two killers some psychological mystery, tilting them toward humanity here and there in the narrative, but his victims had a purely literary job to do; as Shields points out, the author required "an idealized Clutter family." In the end, Lee's urgings toward complication make us wonder less about why Capote resisted them than about why Lee herself, in her own single, famous book, allowed the war between good and evil to be such a simple matter.

Mr. A. C. Lee, the father of Nelle Harper Lee and the model for Atticus Finch, was never a widower raising children by himself. His wife, Frances Finch Lee, remained alive, if impaired, throughout the childhood of Nelle and her older siblings. Musical, overweight, and sometimes loudly difficult, she suggests an inversion of the birdlike, timid Bonnie Clutter. Her behavior placed a considerable strain on Nelle, who eventually, according to Shields, "wiped the slate clean of the conflict between herself and her mother" by killing off Mrs. Atticus Finch before "To Kill a Mockingbird" even begins.

Mr. Lee was a "fond and indulgent father," who, in addition to practicing law, edited Monroeville's local paper and served in the state legislature. He believed in segregation, low taxes, and noblesse oblige, and, as an elder of the First United Methodist Church, was prepared to scold the pastor for too much sermonizing about racial prejudice and unfair labor conditions. "Get off the 'social justice' and get back on the Gospel," he ordered the Reverend Ray Whatley, in 1952. The minister was soon associated with Martin Luther King, Jr., and as the fifties wore on Mr. Lee himself became much more progressive about civil-rights issues. Ambivalent and stretchable, he seems, all in all, a more interesting figure than Atticus Finch, the plaster saint for whom he provided the mold.

In "To Kill a Mockingbird," empathy is Atticus's chief and much repeated prescription for all that ails us morally. "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view," he tells his daughter, Scout. That goes for her teacher, Miss Caroline Fisher; for the head of a lynch mob; and for the man who eventually tries to kill Scout and her brother. Atticus's speech can be as stiff as his rectitude ("The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience"), and in conversation with his children he tends toward the stagey and the sententious. The novel sometimes makes up for dramatic shortcomings by squeezing yet another puff of rhetoric from its adult protagonist, who fishes for compliments ("Sometimes I think I'm a total failure as a parent") and has a way of making forbearance itself insufferable.

The tomboyish Scout is probably a truer refraction of Harper Lee's youth than Catherine Keener is of her early adulthood. But Scout, too, is a kind of highly constructed doll, feisty and cute on every subject from algebra to grown-ups ("They don't get around to doin' what they say they're gonna do half the time"). In real life, children do not tell their elders "You don't understand children much"; but Scout does.

More troublesome than the dialogue, Lee's narrative voice is a wildly unstable compound, a forced mixture—sometimes in the same sentence—of Scout's very young perspective and a fully adult one. Phrases like "throughout my early life" and "when we were small" serve only to jar us out of a past that we've already been seeing, quite clearly, through the eyes of the little girl. Information that has been established gets repeated, and the book's sentences are occasionally so clumsy that a reader can't visualize the action before being asked to picture its opposite: "A flash of plain fear was going out of [Atticus's] eyes, but returned when Dill and Jem wriggled into the light."

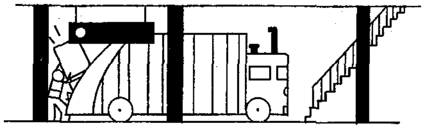
Indisputably, much in the novel works. Ladies with "frostings of sweat and sweet talcum" and "rain-rotted gray houses" are finely evoked, as is the way Lee's Monroeville (called Maycomb in the novel) believes in the hereditary replication of all human gesture and behavior. But a reader cannot help feeling that he has been transported to a Booth Tarkington novel, a Southern version of "Penrod" or "Seventeen," where summer goes by "in routine contentment," until the author, a few chapters in, suffers a fit of high seriousness. The theme of justice descends upon the book like the opening of school. Late in 1960, in commenting on the book's success, Flannery O'Connor declared, "It's interesting that all the folks that are buying it don't know they're reading a child's book."

The novel's courtroom drama doesn't derive, as has often been assumed, from the nineteen-thirties case of the Scottsboro Boys. Late in the nineteen-nineties, Lee revealed to a biographer of Richard Wright that she had based the trial of Tom Robinson on the experience of Walter Lett, a Negro whose arrest for raping a white woman was reported in the Monroe *Journal* on November 9, 1933. Whatever the source, the novel requires Tom Robinson's conviction as surely as the town itself does. Without it, the reader will not have the chance, like the Negroes in the courthouse balcony, to stand up and salute Atticus's nobly futile defense.

The book never persists in ambiguity. Mr. Underwood, a man who "despises Negroes" but protects Atticus with a shotgun, is glimpsed a couple of times and then dropped. The author prefers returning to the feel-good and the improbable, such as the Ku Klux Klan story that Atticus tells his children: "They paraded by Mr. Sam Levy's house one night, but Sam just stood on his porch and told 'em things had come to a pretty pass, he'd sold 'em the very sheets on their backs. Sam made 'em so ashamed of themselves they went away." If it were this easy, Atticus would have won Tom Robinson's acquittal. By the time the novel nears its conclusion and a classmate of Scout's gives a report on how bad Hitler is, the book has begun to cherish its own goodness.

Boo Radley, the agonized recluse living just down the street from the Finches, remains hidden and tantalizing for most of the novel, almost like the authorial imagination that never quite frees itself from fine sentiment. But in the end Boo, too, is there to do good; once he's done it, Scout takes him by the hand and leads him out of the book.

According to Shields, reviews of the novel, which came out in 1960, left Lee with feelings of "dizzying joy" and "vindication." After selling the first few hundred thousand copies of an eventual thirty million, the book went on to win the 1961 Pulitzer Prize and to become, in Shields's estimation, "like *Catch-22, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Portnoy's Complaint, On the Road, The Bell Jar, Soul on Ice,* and *The Feminine Mystique*—books that seized the imagination of the post-World War II generation—a novel that figured in changing 'the system.' "



But if it's true that by 1988 the book "was taught in 74 percent of the nation's public schools"—a statistic issued by the National Council of Teachers of English, who are apparently uninclined to make an old-fashioned fuss over the book's dangling modifiers—it is less because the novel was likely to stimulate students toward protest than because it acted as a kind of moral Ritalin, an ungainsayable endorser of the obvious. "How can you be an Atticus?" asks one piece of curricular material to be found posted on the Web. Shields is able to cite a scholar, Claudia Durst Johnson, "who has published extensively" on this single book, which "readers in surveys rank as the most influential in their lives after the Bible." For all that, readers returning to the book after many years may find themselves echoing the film Capote's boozed-up muttering about "To Kill a Mockingbird": "I frankly don't see what all the fuss is about."

Actually, this remark is made in connection with the 1962 movie version of the novel, a movie that, like the film adaptation of "Gone with the Wind," is rather better than the original material. Lee's agents handled the book with care, getting it into the sensitive hands of the director Robert Mulligan and the producer Alan J. Pakula. To play Atticus, Lee wanted Spencer Tracy and Universal wanted Rock Hudson; Bing Crosby wanted himself. The part went to Gregory Peck, an actor so closely associated with "composure and dignity and a maturity of spirit and a morality and a sober-mindedness" that, years later, "Capote" 's Bennett Miller may have momentarily thought of him for Harper Lee.

Peck's performance is top-heavy with a kind of civic responsibility, and a Yankee frost often kills his carefully tended Southern accent, but his Atticus is still more subtle than the book's. Credit here must go to Horton Foote's screenplay, which, unlike most Hollywood adaptations, tends to prune rather than gild the dialogue from its published source. In the

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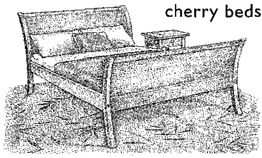

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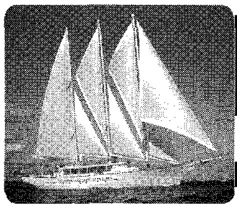

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book, Scout asks Atticus if he really is a "nigger-lover," as she's heard him called, and he responds, "I certainly am. I do my best to love everybody." Foote skips this cloying exchange, and has the father explain himself with a less self-regarding line from the book: "I'm simply defending a Negro." The same principle of selection is at work when it comes to Jem's exasperation with his sister. Foote uses a close variant of a plain line from Lee ("I swear, Scout, you act more like a girl all the time"), rather than the archly implausible line ("You act so much like a girl it's mortifyin' ") that she also makes available.

The novel is full of set pieces that provide either local color or the opportunity for some Aesopian underlining of Atticus's rectitude. Mulligan filmed and then cut an episode in which Mrs. Dubose, a local termagant, is shown trying to free herself from a secret morphine habit before she dies. Good as the actress Ruth White's performance of the scene was, "it stopped the film," Pakula realized. The episode stops the novel, too, but provides Atticus with the chance to make a speech about courage ("She was the bravest person I ever knew"). Lubricated with the syrup of Elmer Bernstein's score, the movie has a propulsion that the novel never achieves. The film even solves the book's vocal problems, extracting bits of the adult narrative line to use, sparingly, as voice-over.

Flush with the success of "In Cold Blood," Capote threw the famous Black and White Ball at the Plaza Hotel. With her new wealth from "To Kill a Mockingbird," Lee purchased a statue of John Wesley for the First United Methodist Church of Monroeville. She had more or less ceased giving interviews by 1964, and stuck to a quiet pattern of spending part of the year in New York and part in Alabama, where even now her ninety-four-year-old sister Alice acts as gatekeeper. She has, of late, been a bit more conspicuously out and about—attending a ninetieth-birthday party for Horton Foote in New York—but the privacy of her past several decades allows Shields reasonably to argue that Capote's public unravelling may have acted for her as a cautionary tale.

Lee has resisted biographers, including Shields, whose requests for coöperation, he says, she "declined with vigor." A former high-school teacher who has written nonfiction books for young adults, Shields has been enterprising in the face of frustration, basing his biography "on six hundred interviews and other sorts of communication with Harper Lee's friends, associates, and former classmates." He offers the book as a kind of homemade present, whose "unorthodox methods" include some slightly imaginative reconstructions, at least one Internet anecdote, and a tendency to pad or wander from the subject when his material runs thin. If the biographer sometimes loses a sense of proportion, that's understandable enough with a life as front-loaded as Lee's.

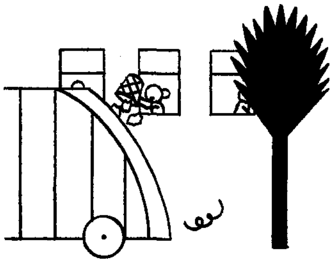
Predictably, any number of her personal mysteries remain unsolved at the biography's end. Did Lee have a romance with an Alabama professor? Did she have what Shields calls "a chaste affair" with Maurice Crain? Capote once hinted at something unhappy between them, and Shields is tempted to see a lack of evidence on this subject as being the evidence itself: "Among [Crain's] papers at Columbia University, there is not a single piece of correspondence from Nelle. It's as if the collection was scoured clean of the relationship."

The greatest mystery, of course, is why Lee never published a second novel, and whether she even got very far in writing one. Absent some late-life efflorescence, "To Kill a Mockingbird" will be it for her, despite a once professed desire to become "the Jane Austen of south Alabama" and a claim, in the years just after the novel's publication, to be spending between six and twelve hours a day at her desk. As time went on, her editor grew impatient, and her agents became anxious. Eventually, they stopped asking. Shields attributes to Alice the report that, sometime in the nineteen-seventies, "just as Nelle was finishing the novel, a burglar broke into her apartment and stole the manuscript." What Lee may share most with Capote—who was forever promising and not delivering "Answered Prayers"—is a kind of flamboyant silence, the typewriter they once passed back and forth under the summer sun having become, for both of them, thirty years later, too hot not to cool down. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Elements of Style, *by Wendy Wasserstein (Knopf; $23.95).* The playwright Wendy Wasserstein, who died earlier this year, had the rare ability to be sardonic and compassionate at once—a talent put to the test in this novel about the goofy attempts of Manhattan ladies who lunch to adapt to post-9/11 life. The Axis of Evil notwithstanding, the characters' lives continue to consist mainly of elaborate dances of social one-upmanship. The heroine, through whose eyes the other characters are satirized, is a well-groomed (Spence, Princeton) woman who, unlike her friends, is unmarried and works for a living—as a Fifth Avenue pediatrician, treating both the children of her social peers and the disadvantaged of East Harlem. While the keynote is hilarity, Wasserstein also demonstrates, with sly grace, a vulnerability that cuts across class lines.

4% Famous, *by Deborah Schoeneman (Shaye Areheart; $21.95).* The recent scandal at the New York *Post* couldn't have come at a better time for this début novel; Schoeneman, a former Page Six contributor, makes much of the perks, freebies, and quid pro quo of the gossip game. Her heroine aspires to be an investigative reporter but has a job as the "legs" for a weekly column, trawling the party circuit for tidbits of rumor. The plot is unashamedly formulaic: girl meets dashing, on-the-rise chef; chef breaks girl's heart; chef fails miserably while girl finds happiness with the boring but decent guy who was there all along. Schoeneman's occasional attempts at social critique—for instance, the observation that very thin girls may be on Ritalin—come off more like life-style tips, and the novel's many veiled references to actual people make it read something like an extended blind item.



House of War, *by James Carroll (Houghton Mifflin; $30).* Carroll was born the same week in January, 1943, that the Pentagon was dedicated, the Manhattan Project got under way, and Roosevelt declared that the goal of the war was the enemy's "unconditional surrender." In this "biography" of the Pentagon, he extends these moments into a fuguelike history of American military power from Hiroshima to Iraq. The dominant theme is personal: growing up, Carroll, whose father, a general, worked in the Pentagon, saw the building both as his "twin" and as "a kind of dark woods." On the practical side, he argues that "in the nuclear age, civilian oversight of American military policy had become largely mythical," that the Pentagon had "Congress in its thrall and presidents at its mercy." And yet his most fascinating stories involve moments—as in the Berlin crisis and the Vietnam War—when civilians successfully opposed the Pentagon's monolithic power.

The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton, *by Kathryn Hughes (Knopf; $29.95).* "Beeton's Book of Household Management," a colossal compendium of recipes and domestic advice—on topics ranging from the dangers of undomesticated swine to the legal rights of married women—went on sale in 1861, was reprinted endlessly, and made the name "Mrs. Beeton" a byword for Victorian domesticity. But this magnificent biography of Isabella Beeton, who died at the age of twenty-eight, reveals a more unconventional figure. Married to a chaotic publisher of popular magazines, Beeton began working alongside her husband partly out of financial necessity. Her famous work was simply one in a series of commissioned volumes, and was mostly put together from other sources. Hughes shows how the book emerged at a time when housewives were struggling to reconcile a vanishing "hand-made" world with a new one of consumer choice. Beeton's achievement was to establish the housewife, as, in her words, "a person of far more importance in a community than she usually thinks she is."

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BLOOD AND PAINT

Australians in the art world.

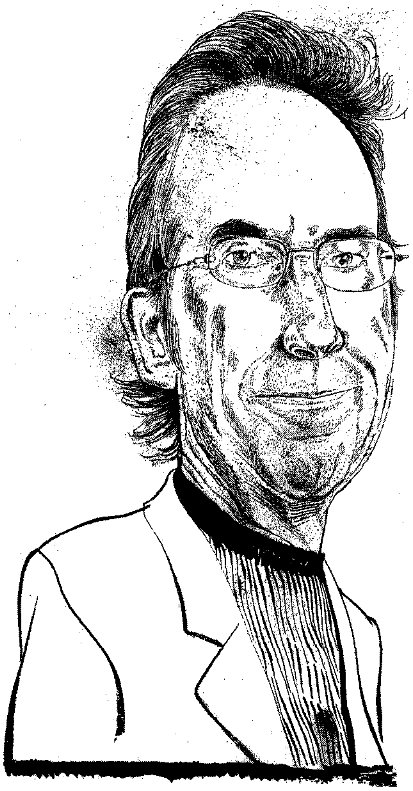
BY JOHN UPDIKE

Why, I have sometimes wondered, has the very brilliant, very Australian novelist Peter Carey chosen to live, since 1990, in New York City? Perhaps, I reasoned, it was to gain the exile's significant artistic advantage of enhancement through distance, isolating his homeland from the eroding clutter of ongoing experience. Russia for Nabokov and Ireland for Joyce became luminous reconstructions, shimmering in every lost and recalled detail. But the answer may be simpler than that: if he is anything like the hero and heroine of his newest novel, "Theft: A Love Story" (Knopf; $24), Carey lives in New York to look at pictures. That he is something like his hero, the passionate but passé painter Michael Boone (or Butcher Bones, as he is called by his mentally handicapped younger brother, Hugh, known to his intimates as Slow Bones), seems beyond dispute: Carey and Michael Boone were born the same year, 1943, and in the same place, Bacchus Marsh, a town northwest of Melbourne. Butcher expresses, with fiction's inevitable hyperbole, an Australian cultural grievance he shares with the love of his life, Marlene Leibovitz, née Cook:

> We had been born walled out from art, had never guessed it might exist, until we slipped beneath the gate or burnt down the porter's house, or jemmied the bathroom window, and then we saw what had been kept from us, in our sleepouts, in our outside dunnies, our drafty beer-hoppy public bars, and then we went half mad with joy.

Half mad, too, with ambition and rapacious dreams of gaining attention and riches in the cultural centers—Paris and London, New York and Tokyo—far from Down Under's sea-girt isolation. Marlene, who comes from a town "not much bigger than Bacchus Marsh" called Benalla, where her mother ran a coffee shop, feels her cultural disadvantage even more viscerally than Butcher: confronting, in New York in 1974, the beautiful, decadent man who will become her husband, she thinks, "We Australians are really shit. We know nothing. We are so bloody ugly."

The beautiful decadent—a fraction more than half mad, as it turns out—is Olivier Leibovitz, the sole child of Jacques Leibovitz, an Estonia-born Cubist contemporary of Picasso. His major canvases, if authentic, are worth millions. Authentication is the powerful right of the possessor of the *droit moral*—"the one," according to Carey, "who gets to say if the work is real or false." The right forms an entity under French law that can be inherited, just like a share of stock or a Limoges tureen. When Leibovitz died (at the age of eighty-one, in the sight of his five-year-old son, in a sudden collapse at the dinner table, face down into a Picasso cheese plate, which broke in two), the *droit moral* passed to his widow, Dominique, who swiftly appropriated fifty Leibovitzes, "many of them abandoned or incomplete," which she, in league with her lover and, subsequently, husband, Honoré Le Noël, the painter's attentive chronicler, doctored and signed and authenticated and sold over the years. The pair fell out, however, when Dominique discovered Honoré in bed with the English poet Roger Martin. In the divorce, she won most of their remaining loot, but in 1969 she turned up strangled in a Nice (not nice) hotel. Though her ex-husband fought legally for the lucrative *droit moral*, the judge awarded it to Olivier, at this point a seventeen-year-old student at St. Paul's in London. The boy knew little about art and, further, had come to hate his father's paintings to the point that he couldn't bear to touch them. "These great works of art make him ill, really, physically ill," his wife, lovely Marlene from Benalla, confides to Butcher Bones. In New York, as a step in her seduction of Olivier, the young Aussie ignoramus had put herself to school under Milton Hesse, the author of a youthful monograph on Leibovitz but now, nearing sixty, "in the process of becoming that creature we all fear the most—a bitter old painter whose friends are famous, whose own walls are now stacked with twenty-foot-long canvases no-one wants to buy." Marlene makes herself expert enough to become an authenticator, but it is her drug-raddled, art-averse husband who has the *droit moral*. She wants it, and Butcher Bones, after an impoverishing divorce and four years in jail for trying to steal his own paintings from his ex-wife, wants to recover his vocation and his fame. These desires, and the mounting desire of the two Australians for each other, drive the plot of "Theft."



Peter Carey

JACK UNRUH

The novel executes the plot conscientiously and cleverly, but seems frequently to look away from it, dwelling instead on such matters as loving Australia even as one leaves it, and the love the two brothers bear each other even as the elder regards the younger, defective one as a burdensome nuisance and is regarded in turn as an inconsiderate exploiter and a grotesque egoist.

Butcher narrates most of the chapters, but Hugh breaks in for about a third of them. He is a magnificent creation, from the same family of lovable golems as Bob McCorkle in Carey's previous novel, "My Life as a Fake" (2003). His lightly punctuated ravings have the ingenuous poetry of the bandit narrator's voice in the novel before that, "True History of the Kelly Gang" (2001). Hugh uses capital letters to fine rhetorical effect, as in this reflection on his brother's sudden enthusiasm for a show in Japan that Marlene promises him:

> It's a big bloody mystery to me that a man so dead set against QUEEN ELIZABETH OF ENGLAND could get himself so rigid about the crown princess of Japan, but soon he had a great STIFFY, THROBBING LIKE A SOCK FULL OF GRASSHOPPERS. And who am I to understand his secret squirming brain?

Even without capitals, Hugh in his spasmodic way can spin an eloquent meditation, as when he starts to brag of his useful services to Butcher's paintings, cutting the canvas along a specific thread and tweezing away the bodies of insects caught in the wet paint:

> I have been informed that there is no-one else on Earth who could part those threads for nine feet without an error. But then again I do not care, all is vanity, and many times I think I am nothing but a big swishing gurgling pumping clock, walking backwards and forwards along the road to Bellingen each day, spring, summer, flies, moths, dragonflies, all fluttering flittering tiny clocks, a mist of clocks, each moment closer to oblivion. Impediments to art. Who will remove us with the tweezers?

Exactly what is medically wrong with Hugh's head is never explained; all we know is that he neglects to wash and shave and likes sitting in a chair beside a busy sidewalk and was forbidden, by his fierce father, the butcher Blue Bones, to use the slaughtering knife, whereas his brother, "three inches shorter" and an aspiring painter, was allowed to. When agitated or offended, Hugh breaks the offender's little finger, and under stress is aware of "sparks in my long muscles and a click in my head like a catching latch in need of oil." But he does not, like Lennie in Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men," squeeze to death what he likes to hold, or, like Benjy in Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury," need a constant attendant. He knows enough to spell "Filippino Lippi" and "myxomatosis" and to lyrically express the butcher's creed: "Never did a Bones take life lightly. If it was a fish or an ant, then possibly. But a beast's heart tips the scales at five pounds and no matter how many you slaughter you cannot do it without a thought."

The so-called Butcher, who refused to enter his father's profession, seems a slaughterer as he works, screwing plywood into hitherto ungouged floors, and rhapsodizing over paint like a vampire feasting on a vein:

> The undiluted greens I did not even bother with, but the others I was into like a snouty pig—huge luscious jars, greens so fucking dark, satanic, black holes that could suck your heart out of your chest.

His every activity is brutal, strenuous, sucky: "I sucked love like phthalo green sucks light," he says of himself with Marlene, and Hugh reports, "Butcher bought a plastic wading pool and then constructed a metal crossbar and once this was bolted to the floor we would drag the canvas like a reluctant beast through a cattle dip of paint." Paint, to which Carey has evidently devoted considerable research, carries, like blood, life's essentials: "Green would not be my only colour, but rather my theorem, my argument, my family tree and soon I had all ten bloody power drills committed in one way or another, mixing my demon dark, with gesso, with safflower oil, kerosene, with cadmium yellow, with red madder; the names are pretty but beside the point—there is no name for either God or light."

At one point, Butcher describes himself as "running parallel with my huge demented brother, linked and mirrored like a double bloody helix." Siamese twins could scarcely be more connected. "If I lost my brother I was lost myself," Hugh writes. Butcher tells us, "He had my brawny sloping shoulders, my lower lip, my hairy back, my peasant calves." The two brothers, one a genius and the other a simpleton, generate in their streams of utterance a kindred prose, hectic and shambling and given to splashes of Biblical echo and pithy colloquialisms like "skip" (trash container), "ute" (utility vehicle), "skint" (broke), "dunny" (toilet), and "batty" (bottom). The DNA weave of fraternal kinship is so cunningly, affectionately worked that it overshadows the love between Butcher and Marlene. She is rendered as brisk, poised, resourceful, ruthless, and opaque in her worldly dealings but in intimacy magically weightless—"light and silky as a wish beside me"—and tender. Better yet, she thinks he is a great painter. She and Butcher, fools for art and for getting their way, are made for each other. We believe him when he avows:

> I was at home with her, with her light, slight body, her bottomless eyes. . . . The shape of her face, the bones, the slightly narrowed eyes, the taut lovely funny upper lip.

For all that, we tend to lose sight of her amid the frolic of the Boone brothers' giddy, unbuttoned, reminiscing monologues. Peter Carey is a superb writer, whose prose is always active, and who infuses his characters, however eccentric, with a warmth that lets them live in our minds. But "Theft" is not a superb novel; there is something displaced at its heart. Its colorful means keep us at one remove from the central action, which, in retrospect, is perfidious and shocking. The homely idiom of "True History of the Kelly Gang" formed a running plea for the humanity of the murderous hero; here the unbridled egotism of the one narrator and the wistful confusions of the other prevent us from viewing developments clearly. We enter, perhaps, too late, when too much has already happened. We expect Butcher's divorced wife, called only "the plaintiff," and his pre-pubescent son, Billy, to take a bigger role, to figure in some final reckoning, but they hardly make an appearance. The former household is most vividly, if not very clearly, reflected in Hugh's erratic memories:

> They would not give me the knife and so I went to live with the so-called butcher and the darling boy, peaches in the grass, the sweet rotten aroma of his marriage, I knew it but could not name it as I circled round the boy, trying to keep him safe and then it was me that hurt him.

Hugh, the lumbering epitome of Australian backwardness, runs away with the novel, while the expertly researched and caricatured art scene hangs flat on a well-lit wall. ♦

WHO KNEW? DEPARTMENT

From a correction in Audubon.

> The urine of the red fox smells more like skunk musk than the urine of the gray fox, as stated in "Winter Yaps."

BOOKS

GAME THEORY

When it comes to athletic prowess, don't believe your eyes.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

The first player picked in the 1996 National Basketball Association draft was a slender, six-foot guard from Georgetown University named Allen Iverson. Iverson was thrilling. He was lightning quick, and could stop and start on a dime. He would charge toward the basket, twist and turn and writhe through the arms and legs of much taller and heavier men, and somehow find a way to score. In his first season with the Philadelphia 76ers, Iverson was voted the N.B.A.'s Rookie of the Year. In every year since 2000, he has been named to the N.B.A.'s All-Star team. In the 2000-01 season, he finished first in the league in scoring and steals, led his team to the second-best record in the league, and was named, by the country's sportswriters and broadcasters, basketball's Most Valuable Player. He is currently in the midst of a four-year, seventy-seven-million-dollar contract. Almost everyone who knows basketball and who watches Iverson play thinks that he's one of the best players in the game.

But how do we *know* that we're watching a great player? That's an easier question to answer when it comes to, say, golf or tennis, where players compete against one another, under similar circumstances, week after week. Nobody would dispute that Roger Federer is the world's best tennis player. Baseball is a little more complicated, since it's a team sport. Still, because the game consists of a sequence of discrete, ritualized encounters between pitcher and hitter, it lends itself to statistical rankings and analysis. Most tasks that professionals perform, though, are surprisingly hard to evaluate. Suppose that we wanted to measure something in the real world, like the relative skill of New York City's heart surgeons. One obvious way would be to compare the mortality rates of the patients on whom they operate—except that substandard care isn't necessarily fatal, so a more accurate measure might be how quickly patients get better or how few complications they have after surgery. But recovery time is a function as well of how a patient is treated in the intensive-care unit, which reflects the capabilities not just of the doctor but of the nurses in the I.C.U. So now we have to adjust for nurse quality in our assessment of surgeon quality. We'd also better adjust for how sick the patients were in the first place, and since well-regarded surgeons often treat the most difficult cases, the best surgeons might well have the poorest patient recovery rates. In order to measure something you thought was fairly straightforward, you really have to take into account a series of things that aren't so straightforward.

Basketball presents many of the same kinds of problems. The fact that Allen Iverson has been one of the league's most prolific scorers over the past decade, for instance, could mean that he is a brilliant player. It could mean that he's selfish and takes shots rather than passing the ball to his teammates. It could mean that he plays for a team that races up and down the court and plays so quickly that he has the opportunity to take many more shots than he would on a team that plays more deliberately. Or he might be the equivalent of an average surgeon with a first-rate I.C.U.: maybe his success reflects the fact that everyone else on his team excels at getting rebounds and forcing the other team to turn over the ball. Nor does the number of points that Iverson scores tell us anything about his tendency to do other things that contribute to winning and losing games; it doesn't tell us how often he makes a mistake and loses the ball to the other team, or commits a foul, or blocks a shot, or rebounds the ball. Figuring whether one basketball player is better than another is a challenge similar to figuring out whether one heart surgeon is better than another: you have to find a way to interpret someone's individual statistics in the context of the team that they're on and the task that they are performing.

In "The Wages of Wins" (Stanford; $29.95), the economists David J. Berri, Martin B. Schmidt, and Stacey L. Brook set out to solve the Iverson problem. Weighing the relative value of fouls, rebounds, shots taken, turnovers, and the like, they've created an algorithm that, they argue, comes closer than any previous statistical measure to capturing the true value of a basketball player. The algorithm yields what they call a Win Score, because it expresses a player's worth as the number of wins that his contributions bring to his team. According to their analysis, Iverson's finest season was in 2004-05, when he was worth ten wins, which made him the thirty-sixth-best player in the league. In the season in which he won the Most Valuable Player award, he was the ninety-first-best player in the league. In his worst season (2003-04), he was the two-hundred-and-twenty-seventh-best player in the league. On average, for his career, he has ranked a hundred and sixteenth. In some years, Iverson has not even been the best player on his own team. Looking at the findings that Berri, Schmidt, and Brook present is enough to make one wonder what exactly basketball experts—coaches, managers, sportswriters—know about basketball.

Basketball experts clearly appreciate basketball. They understand the gestalt of the game, in the way that someone who has spent a lifetime thinking about and watching, say, modern dance develops an understanding of that art form. They're able to teach and coach and motivate; to make judgments and predictions about a player's character and resolve and stage of development. But the argument of "The Wages of Wins" is that this kind of expertise has real limitations when it comes to making precise evaluations of individual performance, whether you're interested in the consistency of football quarterbacks or in testing claims that N.B.A. stars "turn it on" during playoffs. The baseball legend Ty Cobb, the authors point out, had a lifetime batting average of .366, almost thirty points higher than the former San Diego Padres outfielder Tony Gwynn, who had a lifetime batting average of .338:

> So Cobb hit safely 37 percent of the time while Gwynn hit safely on 34 percent of his at bats. If all you did was watch these players, could you say who was a better hitter? Can one

> really tell the difference between 37 percent and 34 percent just staring at the players play? To see the problem with the non-numbers approach to player evaluation, consider that out of every 100 at bats, Cobb got three more hits than Gwynn. That's it, three hits.

Expert intuitions about performance can be wildly off.

Michael Lewis made a similar argument in his 2003 best-seller, "Moneyball," about how the so-called sabermetricians have changed the evaluation of talent in baseball. Baseball is sufficiently transparent, though, that the size of the discrepancies between intuitive and statistically aided judgment tends to be relatively modest. If you mistakenly thought that Gwynn was better than Cobb, you were still backing a terrific hitter. But "The Wages of Wins" suggests that when you move into more complex situations, like basketball, the limitations of "seeing" become enormous. Jermaine O'Neal, a center for the Indiana Pacers, finished third in the Most Valuable Player voting in 2004. His Win Score that year put him forty-fourth in the league. In 2004-05, the forward Antoine Walker made as much money as the point guard Jason Kidd, even though Walker produced 0.6 wins for Atlanta and Boston and Kidd produced nearly twenty wins for New Jersey. The Win Score algorithm suggests that Ray Allen has had nearly as good a career as Kobe Bryant, whom many consider the top player in the game, and that the journeyman forward Jerome Williams was actually among the strongest players of his generation.

Most egregious is the story of a young guard for the Chicago Bulls named Ben Gordon. Last season, Gordon finished second in the Rookie of the Year voting and was named the league's top "sixth man"—that is, the best non-starter—because he averaged an impressive 15.1 points per game in limited playing time. But Gordon rebounds less than he should, turns over the ball frequently, and makes such a low percentage of his shots that, of the N.B.A.'s top thirty-three scorers—that is, players who score at least one point for every two minutes on the floor—Gordon's Win Score ranked him dead last.

The problem for basketball experts is that, in a situation with many variables, it's difficult to know how much weight to assign to each variable. Buying a house is agonizing because we look at the size, the location, the back yard, the proximity to local schools, the price, and so on, and we're unsure which of those things matters most. Assessing heart-attack risk is a notoriously difficult task for similar reasons. A doctor can analyze a dozen different factors. But how much weight should be given to a patient's cholesterol level relative to his blood pressure? In the face of such complexity, people construct their own arbitrary algorithms—they assume that every factor is of equal importance, or randomly elevate one or two factors for the sake of simplifying matters—and we make mistakes because those arbitrary algorithms are, well, arbitrary.

Berri, Schmidt, and Brook argue that the arbitrary algorithms of basketball experts elevate the number of points a player scores above all other considerations. In one clever piece of research, they analyze the relationship between the statistics of rookies and the number of votes they receive in the All-Rookie Team balloting. If a rookie increases his scoring by ten per cent—regardless of how efficiently he scores those points—the number of votes he'll get will increase by twenty-three per cent. If he increases his rebounds by ten per cent, the number of votes he'll get will increase by six per cent. Every other factor, like turnovers, steals, assists, blocked shots, and personal fouls—factors that can have a significant influence on the outcome of a game—seemed to bear no statistical relationship to judgments of merit at all. It's not even the case that high scorers help their team by drawing more fans. As the authors point out, that's only true on the road. At home, attendance is primarily a function of games won. Basketball's decision-makers, it seems, are simply irrational.

It's hard not to wonder, after reading "The Wages of Wins," about the other instances in which we defer to the evaluations of experts. Boards of directors vote to pay C.E.O.s tens of millions of dollars, ostensibly because they believe—on the basis of what they have learned over the years by watching other C.E.O.s—that they are worth it. But so what? We see Allen Iverson, over and over again, charge toward the basket, twisting and turning and writhing through a thicket of arms and legs of much taller and heavier men—and all we learn is to appreciate twisting and turning and writhing. We become dance critics, blind to Iverson's dismal shooting percentage and his excessive turnovers, blind to the reality that the Philadelphia 76ers would be better off without him. "One can play basketball," the authors conclude. "One can watch basketball. One can both play and watch basketball for a thousand years. If you do not systematically track what the players do, and then uncover the statistical relationship between these actions and wins, you will never know why teams win and why they lose." ♦

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THE SKY LINE

MOLTO PIANO

Three new designs demonstrate Renzo Piano's brilliance and his limitations.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

Renzo Piano comes from a family of builders in Genoa, and his firm is called Renzo Piano Building Workshop, as if he weren't a superstar architect but just your friendly neighborhood problem solver. Unlike most other architectural stars, Piano has no signature style. Instead, his work is characterized by a genius for balance and context, an ability to establish inventive correspondences between his buildings and those that surround them. Until now, New York hasn't had a building by Piano, but his expansion of the Morgan Library, which has just reopened as the Morgan Library & Museum, is the beachhead for what may become a significant presence in the city. A skyscraper that will serve as the new headquarters for the *Times* is nearing completion, and Piano's addition to the Whitney Museum of American Art is expected to begin construction within the next two years.

Piano's achievement at the Morgan is to have created a satisfying composition out of three not particularly compatible landmark structures. The old Morgan buildings are awkwardly placed around the intersection of Thirty-sixth Street and Madison Avenue. The best of them, a dazzling Renaissance palazzo that Charles F. McKim designed as J. P. Morgan's personal library in 1906, is tucked away on Thirty-sixth Street. A dull, classical annex next to it, erected by Benjamin W. Morris when the library was opened to the public, in the nineteen-twenties, has the choice location, on the corner, and north of this is a staid nineteenth-century brownstone. The challenge was to link these disparate buildings while also increasing the institution's space by half. Piano's solution is simultaneously subtle and radical. To avoid overwhelming the existing structures, he hid most of the new space underground, sinking storage vaults and a concert hall four stories into the bedrock. At ground level, an elegant glass-and-steel structure weaves between the older buildings and meets the street in two rectilinear façades, one on Madison Avenue and the other on Thirty-sixth Street.

Piano has reorganized everything so that the Madison Avenue façade is the new entrance, but it is from Thirty-sixth Street that you see most clearly how he has both preserved the Morgan and transformed it. The two limestone buildings, McKim's palazzo and Morris's annex, formerly tethered by a dreary connecting walkway, had an uncomfortable relationship with each other. Piano replaced the walkway with a compact steel cube painted a color that echoes the limestone. (Inside it is a gallery of medieval religious objects.) The cube is divided into eight ridged panels, to give it scale and texture, and it provides a firm counterweight to the mass of buildings on either side. It suggests that Piano is less concerned with form-making than he is with balancing masses, materials, and scales. I'd always found Morris's annex bland, but now it seems crisply defined, while McKim's opulent palazzo has acquired a new solidity, at no cost to its elegance.

Piano does something similar on Madison Avenue, but it is less effective. The limestone buildings on Thirty-sixth Street always had an innate competitive tension, but the austere side wall of the Morris annex and the grand old brownstone are two structures with little to say to each other, and they are separated by a wider gap. Piano fills the gap with an elongated version of his

Piano's expansion project at the Morgan Library & Museum links the old buildings by means of a relaxed interior piazza. Photograph by Robert Polidori.

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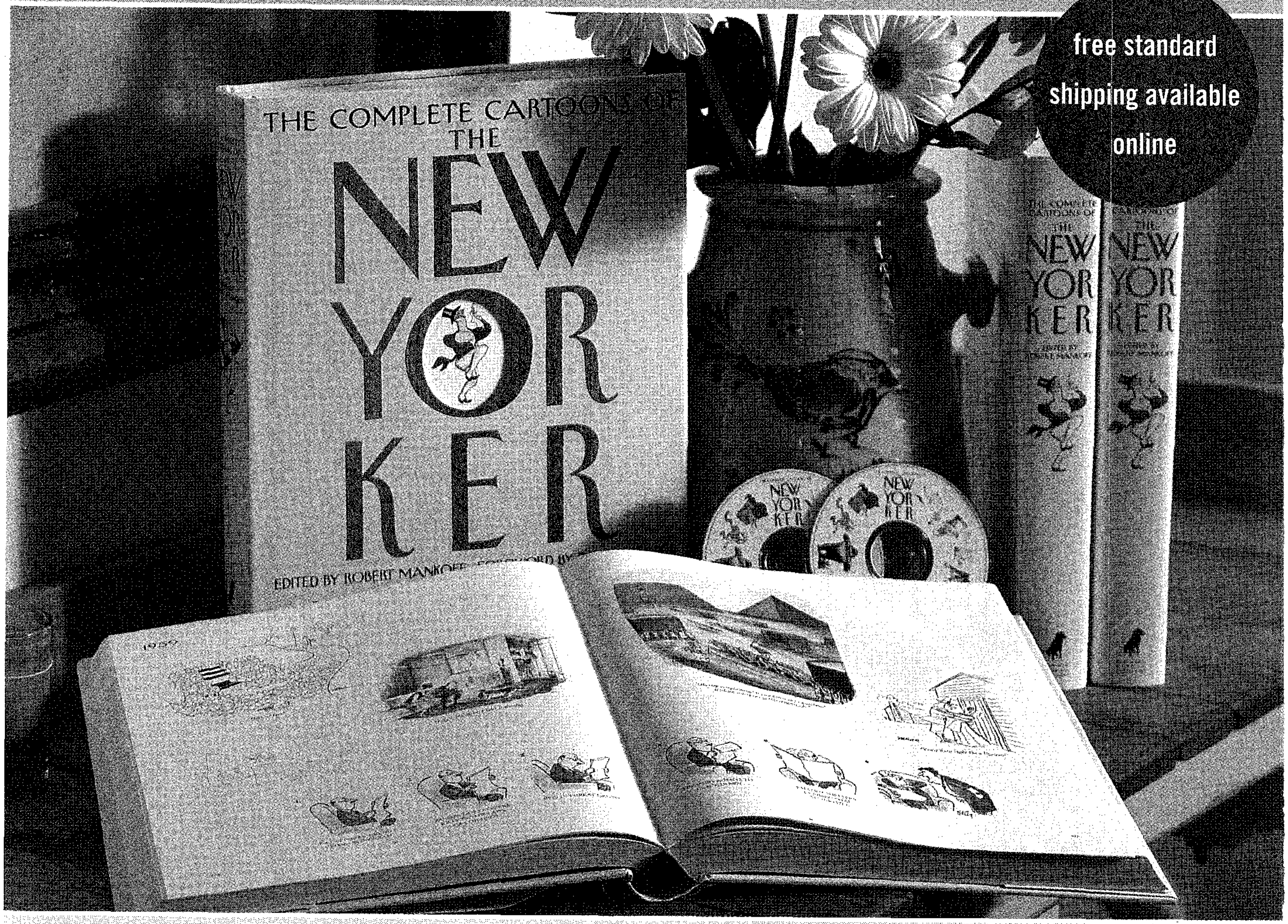

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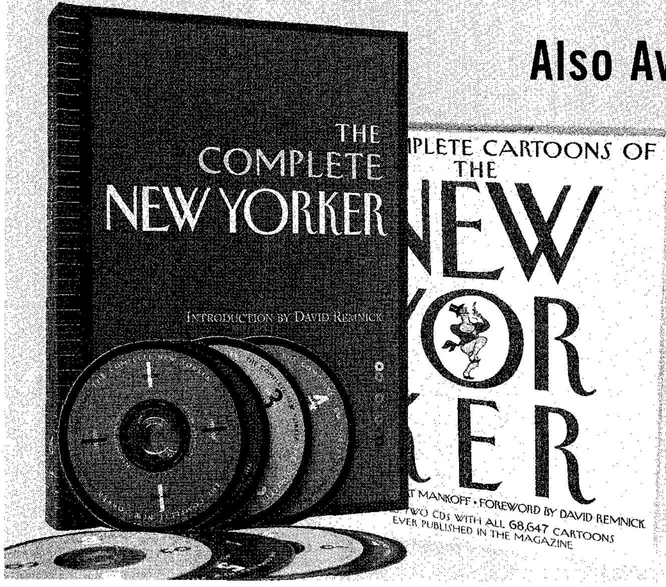

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steel cube—which houses a new reading room—but the proportions aren't as enticing as they are on Thirty-sixth Street. Below the reading room, the new entrance consists of glass doors stretching across the façade, an improvement over the cramped front door in the old annex, but still a little conventional.

Inside, however, the ingenuity of Piano's conception becomes gloriously apparent. He has essentially created a piazza: a fifty-two-foot-high, glass-covered atrium in the middle of the complex, with access to all parts of the institution, new and old. Too often, when exterior walls of old buildings get turned into interior elements of stylish new spaces, they take on the precious air of stage sets. But Piano's loose embrace of the other buildings is free of self-consciousness, and the result makes you think of one of those oddly shaped squares in Italian villages that feel so comfortable. He has done nothing to disguise the irregularity of the space, enhancing its casual ambience with a café off to one side and a couple of ficus trees sprouting through openings in the floor.

This is one of the greatest modern rooms in New York, not by virtue of grandeur or scale but because of the subtle links it establishes between the Morgan's older buildings and the rest of the city. Piano's piazza is defined by its complex sight lines around the rest of the collection and to the street outside. A glass wall at the east end of the piazza abuts the backs of brick apartment buildings, a jumble of ordinariness that here feels familiar and warm. You are connected to New York in this space, yet magically removed from it, as if in a garden. If you position yourself at the right point, near the center of the room, and look through the glass ceiling, you glimpse the top of the Empire State Building poking above a Madison Avenue office building.

When the Morgan hired Piano, in 2000, it had just rejected the work of the three distinguished architects it had invited to submit plans, each of whom proposed large new structures that risked overwhelming the older buildings. (A disclosure: I was an adviser to the Morgan during this competition.) Two of the schemes proposed towers where Piano has placed his court, and, as it happens, a tower is exactly what Piano has come up with for his redesign of the Whitney Museum, some forty blocks north on Madison. Here, too, he succeeded other distinguished architects—Piano's ability to take on troubled projects is a testament to his versatile aesthetic—but the Whitney poses a very different set of challenges. Marcel Breuer's inverted ziggurat is so assertive that nothing marries easily to it. Against its brooding dark granite, a treatment as gentle as Piano's Morgan project would be all but invisible; conversely, previous proposals, by Michael Graves and, later, by Rem Koolhaas, would have loomed over the building and undermined its monolithic power. Piano's solution again shows a mastery of balance, but in an entirely different way from the Morgan. He has proposed a squarish tower, sensibly set as far back from the existing structure as the rather tight lot allows. The design doesn't compete with Breuer's building, but there's nothing timid about it. The plans—a nine-story tower sheathed in stainless-steel panels—promise a softly shimmering presence that will be the precise opposite of Breuer's blunt block. The keynote is quiet assertiveness.

The drawbacks of Piano's approach are becoming discernible, however, as his new headquarters for the *Times*, a fifty-two-story skyscraper, rises rapidly on Eighth Avenue. For skyscrapers, quiet assertiveness isn't enough; once they get above street level, their job is not to balance other buildings but simply to be. The New York Times Building, which Piano has designed in collaboration with the New York firm of FXFowle, is a glass tower set behind a curtain of thin rods which form a sunscreen all the way up the façade. At seven hundred and forty-eight feet, that is a lot of rods. Up close, the tower has the pristine, tensile quality of Piano's smaller work, but seen from a few blocks away the rods blur into something that looks like corrugated metal and the building takes on a strange, thin blandness. It's one thing to design a tower that will play beautifully off the granite of the Whitney, but the Times building has to play off against a whole sky line. If the graceful interweaving of modernism and classicism at the Morgan demonstrates the power that brilliantly conceived, intense pieces of small-scale architecture can possess, the Times building, so far at least, shows the opposite. It comes off as dainty, even flimsy, as if inside this huge tower a little building were struggling to get out. ♦

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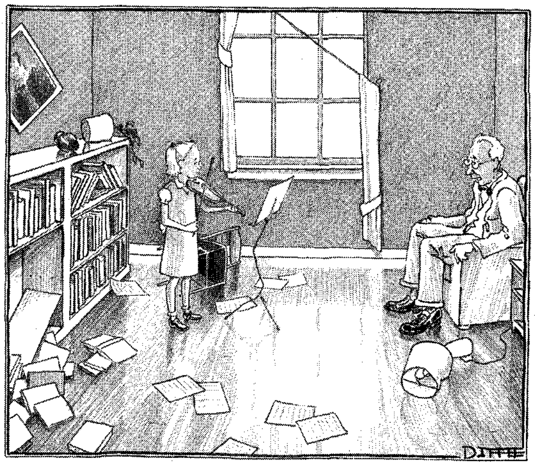
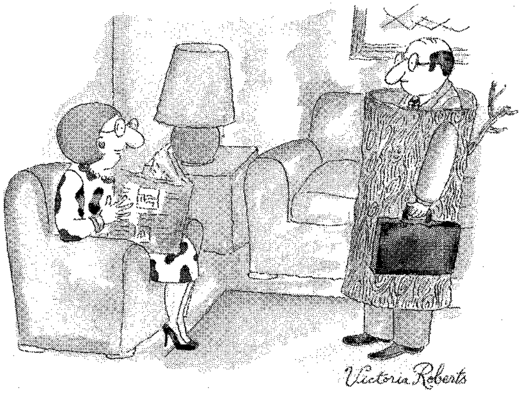
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Michael Crawford, must be received by Sunday, May 28th. Finalists in the May 15th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 12th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"O.K., this time with a little less feeling."
Sherman Ross, Houston, Texas



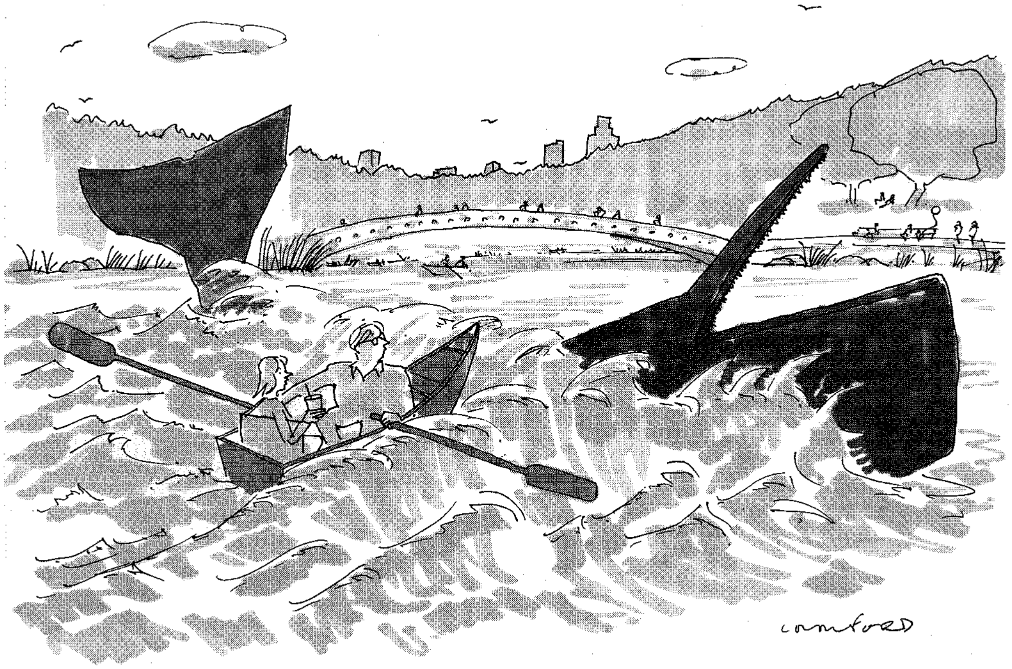
THE FINALISTS

"I'd divorce you, but we need the firewood."
Paul Reitano, New York City

"But what if you fall when no one is around?"
Andrew Berlin, New York City

"How's your new boss at the C.I.A., dear?"
Rick Fischer, St. Louis, Mo.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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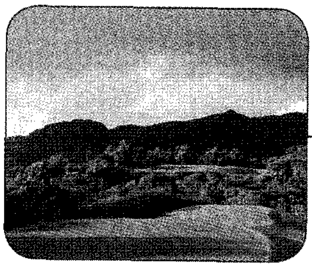

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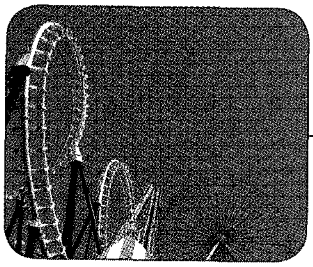

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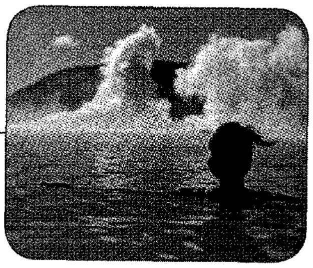

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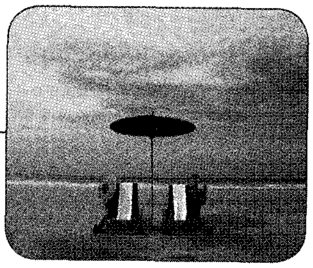

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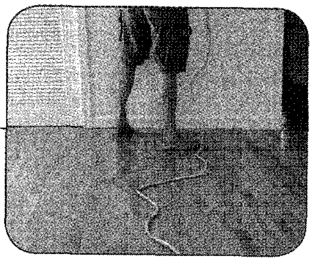

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